

ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY

MAGAZINE

JUNE 1997

DOGWATCH

A dognapper is afoot—
and so are the cops

BY BILL CRENSHAW

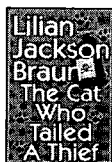
And More New
Stories Of Murder
And Suspense

\$2.95 U.S./\$3.75 CAN.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





1016
\$22.95/\$11.98



0224
\$24.95/\$12.98



0976*
\$25.95/\$12.98



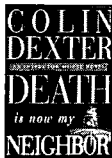
3806
\$25.00/\$12.98



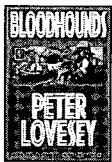
1479
\$24.00/\$11.98



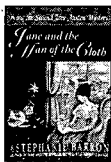
1487*
\$24.95/\$12.98



2030
\$24.00/\$12.98



4093
\$22.00/\$10.98



4101
\$21.95/\$10.98



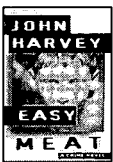
2527
\$22.00/\$10.98



2634
\$20.00/\$10.98



.4044
\$21.95/\$11.98



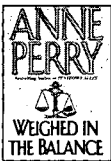
1073
\$23.00/\$10.98



3996
\$21.00/\$10.98



4051
\$22.00/\$10.98



0703
\$23.00/\$10.98



1347
\$24.00/\$11.98



1685
\$21.00/\$10.98



2519
\$22.95/\$11.98

Steal a look at the best

And keep your eyes peeled for the hottest mysteries at criminally low prices. Join *Mystery Guild* today!

SIX REASONS TO JOIN NOW...

- 1. JOINING IS EASY.** Just choose 6 books for 99¢. Your bill (including shipping and handling) will come when membership is confirmed. We'll also send you the FREE *Mystery Guild* Tote.
- 2. YOUR SATISFACTION IS GUARANTEED.** If you're not happy with your books, return them within 10 days at our expense. Your membership will be canceled; you'll owe nothing. The FREE Tote is yours to keep as our "thank you" for trying us.
- 3. SAVE UP TO 60% off publishers' edition prices.** Just pick at least 4 more books at our regular low prices during your membership. Take up to 2 years! Then you may resign membership any time.
- 4. EXTRA BONUS!** Take a 7th book now for \$3.99, plus shipping and handling, and reduce your membership agreement to only 3 books. Every book we offer is a full-text hardcover edition, sometimes altered in size to fit special presses.
- 5. A FREE CLUB MAGAZINE** comes to you up to 17 times a year. Each issue reviews the Featured

Book Selections plus dozens of alternate books—some are special Club editions you won't find anywhere else. Look for up to 2 special issues a year with super selections and more discounts.

6. ORDERING IS SIMPLE. Featured Selections are sent to you automatically. To cancel—or order other books—mail in your Member Reply Form by the marked date. Shipping and handling (plus sales tax, where applicable) will be added to each order. You'll always have 10 days to decide. If your Member Reply Form is late and unwanted books arrive, please return them at our expense.

* Explicit scenes and/or language

Prices in fine print are for publishers' editions.
Prices in bold print are for Club hardcover editions.
All prices are current as we go to press.



FREE TOTE
with membership

LICENSED TO
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



0240
\$25.95/\$11.98



0109*
\$25.00/\$11.98



0588*
\$26.00/\$12.98



1867*
\$25.95/\$11.98



0802*
\$25.95/\$10.98

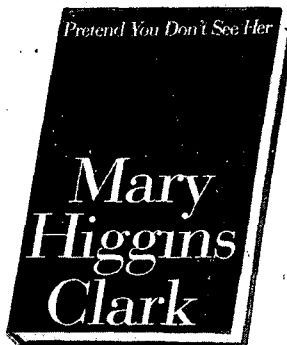


0745
\$22.95/\$11.98

In suspense...

Take **6** mysteries
for **99¢**

with membership



4176 \$25.00/\$12.98



1321
\$26.95/\$13.98



3921
\$23.95/\$11.98



0331
\$21.95/\$10.98



1655
\$23.00/\$11.98



3988
\$21.95/\$10.98



1644
\$26.95/\$14.98



1339
\$21.95/\$10.98



4085
\$23.00/\$11.98

MYSTERY
GUILD

MAIL TO: Mystery Guild
6550 East 30th Street
P.O. Box 6362
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6362

Please write book numbers here:

YES! Please enroll me in *Mystery Guild* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 6 BOOKS I've indicated. Bill me just 99¢, plus shipping and handling. Also, send my **FREE CLUB TOTE**.

SAVE EVEN MORE! Send me this book now and reduce my commitment to 3 books. Bill me an added \$3.99, plus shipping and handling.

(write book number)

--	--	--	--

78664

32

33

Mr./Mrs.

Miss/Ms.

(please print)

Address

Apt.

City

State

ZIP

Telephone, please. ()

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application.

AHM 6/97

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTENTS



SHORT STORIES

THE WALLET by Gary Alexander	6
NEITHER RHYME NOR RIOT by K. R. MacLeish	20
WHO PUT THE POISON IN MRS. MURPHY'S CHOWDER? by William F. Smith	32
WAITING FOR VICTOR by Del Stone, Jr.	51
DOGWATCH by Bill Crenshaw	58
BANK SHOT by D. H. Reddall	92
McGUFFY'S HOUSE by Mike Owens	105
THE SNAWFUS by Jas. R. Petrin	122

MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE HEAD OF CAESAR by G. K. Chesterton	139
---	-----

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES	4
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH	57
UNSOLVED by Robert Kesling	91
SOLUTION TO THE MAY "UNSOLVED"	153
BOOKED & PRINTED by Mary Cannon	154
THE STORY THAT WON	157

ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 42, No. 6, June 1997. Published monthly except for a July/August double issue by Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications. Annual subscription \$33.97 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$41.97 elsewhere, payable in advance in U.S. funds (GST included in Canada). Subscription orders and correspondence regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 54625, Boulder, CO 80322-4625. Editorial and Executive Offices, 1270 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10020. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian postage paid at Windsor, Ontario, Canada, Post International Publications Mail, Product Sales Agreement No. 260665. © 1997 by Dell Magazines, a division of Crosstown Publications, all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Reproduction or use, in any manner, of editorial or pictorial content without express permission is prohibited. Submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 54625, Boulder, CO 80322-4625. In Canada return to 3255 Wyandotte Street East, Windsor, Ontario N8Y 1E9. GST #R123054108.

USPS:523-590 ISSN:0002-5224.

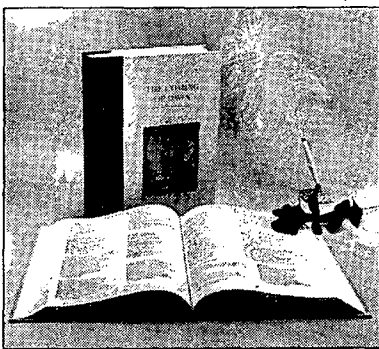
Printed in U.S.A.

COVER BY ROGER ROTH
 LICENSED TO ONEZ.ORG
 ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poetry Contest

\$48,000.00 in Prizes

The National Library of Poetry to award 250 total prizes to amateur poets in coming months



*The National Library of Poetry publishes the work of amateur poets in colorful hardbound anthologies like **The Coming of Dawn**, pictured above. Each volume features poetry by a diverse mix of poets from all over the world.*

Owings Mills, Maryland – The National Library of Poetry has just announced that \$48,000.00 in prizes will be awarded over the next 12 months in the North American Open Amateur Poetry Contest. The contest is open to everyone and entry is free.

“We’re especially looking for poems from new or unpublished poets,” indicated Howard Ely, spokesperson for The National Library of Poetry. “We have a ten year history of awarding large prizes to talented poets who have never before won any type of writing competition.”

How To Enter

Anyone may enter the competition simply by sending in **ONLY ONE** original poem, any subject, any style, to:

**The National Library of Poetry
Suite 6125**

1 Poetry Plaza

Owings Mills, MD 21117-6282

Or enter online at www.poetry.com

The poem should be no more than 20 lines, and the poet’s name and address must appear on the top of the page. “All poets who enter will receive a response concerning their artistry, usually within seven weeks,” indicated Mr. Ely.

Possible Publication

Many submitted poems will also be considered for inclusion in one of The National Library of Poetry’s forthcoming hardbound anthologies. Previous anthologies published by the organization have included *On the Threshold of a Dream*, *Days of Future’s Past*, *Of Diamonds and Rust*, and *Moments More to Go*, among others.

© 1987-1997 The National Library of Poetry

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

K. R. MacLeish, author of "Neither Rhyme nor Riot," lives in Arizona, is a recent law school graduate, has three sons and a daughter, and has been a corrections officer (in both maximum and minimum security institutions) and a probation surveillance officer. "I worked," she says, "as a correctional officer in men's prisons when hiring women was new. I found that a woman (who wasn't shrewish) had an easier time than the male officers because men must always confront each other and prove their masculinity over and over. The prisoners wanted to show their better side to women officers." Her story—her first publication, fiction or nonfiction—is set in a minimum security institution but is filled with the tension good suspense engenders.

Our other new author in this issue also brings us a tale of suspense but of a very different kind. Del Stone, Jr., author of "Waiting for Victor," is a Floridian and assistant managing editor of a daily newspaper. If you have encountered his first novel *Dead Heat*, just out from Mojo Press (the protagonist, according to *Publishers Weekly*, "may be the most outrageous superhero ever conceived for the printed page: a meathook-wielding zombie,"), you'll find "Waiting for Victor" a completely different (and most intriguing) dish of tea.

Mr. Stone has written many previous stories and articles and believes that "the current emphasis on matters related to the Internet and mass media will bring about a lethal homogenization of intellect."

CATHLEEN JORDAN, Editor

LINDA LEE LANDRIGAN, Editorial Assistant

MONICA GAIGE-ROSENSWEIG, Creative Director

SHIRLEY CHAN LEVI, Assistant Art Director

CAROLE DIXON, Production Manager

GEORGE SCHUMACHER, Manager, Subsidiary Rights and Contracts

KATHLEEN HALLIGAN, Subsidiary Rights and Marketing Coordinator

BRUCE W. SHERBOW, Director of Newsstand Sales

SANDY MARLOWE, Circulation Services

Advertising Representative: Media People, Inc. (800) 542-5585

PETER KANTER, Publisher

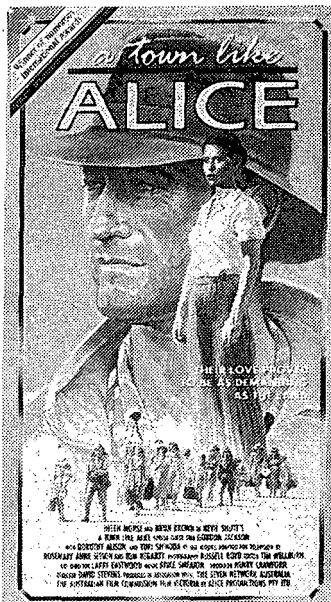
FRAN DANON, Editorial Director

Awesome, Inspiring, Unforgettable...

THE COMPLETE 5-HOUR EPIC ON ONE VIDEO

A TOWN LIKE ALICE

Bryan Brown from "Breaker Morant", "FX", and "Thombirds" stars in this award-winning Masterpiece Theatre presentation. Based on Nevil Shute's 1950 international best-selling novel, A TOWN LIKE ALICE is a tale of enduring love between a headstrong Englishwoman (Helen Morse) and an Australian rancher who together survive the living nightmare of a Japanese concentration camp to start a new life that is every bit as demanding as their war time trials. Set against the brutal chaos of World War II, this taut, spellbinding story spans three continents and two decades as it takes you on an epic journey from the steamy jungles of Malaya to the acrid desolation of the Australian outback.



*There has not been a
richer story told on
television for some
time by anybody.*



INTERNATIONAL AWARD WINNER

Winner of several international awards, including International Emmy Award, D.W. Griffith Award and the 1982 TV Award at the New York Film and Television Festival. A TOWN LIKE ALICE has received worldwide critical acclaim making it a collectible classic that can be treasured for generations. VHS. Color. 301 Minutes.

Abigail's Treasures, Dept. DTLA3

PO Box 66, Avon-By-The-Sea, NJ 07717

YES Please send me the "A Town Like Alice" Videos (Item #W539) as indicated below on 30-day money back guarantee.

- ☐ Send one video for only \$19.95 plus \$3.00 ship. & hdlg. Total \$22.95
☐ Send two videos for only \$38.00 plus \$5.00 ship. & hdlg. Total \$43.00

My check is enclosed for \$_____ (NJ residents add sales tax)

Make check or M.O. payable to Abigail's Treasures.

- ☐ Ms. ☐ Mrs.
☐ Mr.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

To help process order, you may wish to include your daytime phone number _____

Fulfillment: G&C Associates Please allow up to 4-6 weeks for delivery. ©1995

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FICTION



The Wallet

Gary Alexander



Illustration by Laurie Davis

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine 6/97
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The tourist's teeth were brilliantly white and absolutely straight. His mouth was so perfect that Luis Balam thought of it as a deformity that should be repaired with a fist.

"What I'm trying to get across to you is that black coral is an endangered species," the tourist said to Luis's younger daughter. "You people continue chipping it off the reef to sell, pretty soon black coral's history."

Rosa Balam smiled sweetly, held thumb and index finger an eighth of an inch apart, and said, "Sorry. Speak tiny little bit English."

Luis also smiled, but not sweetly. This tourist and his woman, along with another pair of women, were their only customers. Luis would let Rosa and Ester, his other daughter, take care of business.

The tourist grimaced as he spoke, a serious face accompanied by sweeping hand gestures. "Down in sea. Water. *Agua*. Black coral. Yes?"

"Yes," Rosa said, nodding vigorously.

"Soon no more," he said, shaking his head. "Soon all gone. Too *mucho* many necklaces, too *mucho* many bracelets. Soon black coral all gone. Poof!"

The tourist's woman was handling a bracelet of black coral and lapis lazuli set in silver.

Both she and the man were in their thirties. They had blue eyes, yellow hair, and bronzed skin.

Luis had seen their type at Cancún. In their expensive underwear, with their stereo headsets, they ran and jogged along the boulevard or on the beach every morning of their stay, running to nowhere. Luis had thought that running was a habit that *norteamericanos* sought to escape on their costly vacations.

But no. Running was fun and fitness. Luis was skeptical about the fun. Trudging along in the heat and humidity, their expressions were funless, as if a blowtorch were being held to their genitals. Luis Balam did not run unless somebody was chasing him.

"I like this, Denny," the woman said.

"I know you do, Joyce. Just cool it, okay," he said, winking. "You put them on the defensive, then you turn the screws. That's how you jew these people down."

Joyce looked at Denny, half in admiration, half in disgust. "There are times when you can be such a sleaze."

Then, to Rosa, he said, "Leetle tiny bit *dinero* is all me pay. Maybe police no let us take out of Meh-he-co. Endangered species. Investment down *the toileto*. *Comprendo?*"

"God, Denny," Joyce said, rolling her eyes.

"One hundred dollar," Rosa said.

"Oh Lordy, no can do one hundred, Chiquita! Negative. *Nada*. Bad to buy black coral. Bad to sell. Bad for environment. Trouble is, I no buy, some other gringo buy. What'm I gonna do? Joyce, my señorita lady, she like semi-*mucho*. *El cheapo* necklace. Piece of crap. Thirty Yankee dollar, I can do."

"You right, señor," Rosa said. "Me sort of *comprendo*. Black coral will be gone soon. Then *muy* rare, *muy* expensive. You very smart señor. Ninety-five dollar. Cheap. Almost free."

"How soon?" Joyce said, closing a hand around the necklace.

Rosa touched a finger to her lips. "Who can say? Very. Black coral at any time can be quitted. Everybody will want."

"Forty dollars," Denny said.

"Wait a second," Joyce said to Rosa. "Do you know something we don't?"

Luis drifted toward Ester. Her prospective customers were pleasanter. They were husky, middle-aged schoolteachers with baggy shorts and Texas twangs. The ladies and Ester were laughing. They were calling her "dear" and "honey." No sale, Luis supposed. They had the look of browsers, entertaining themselves on the way back to

Cancún from the ruins at Tulum or Cobá.

Ester wouldn't care if she made the sale. Meeting nice people was its own reward. Rosa, on the other hand, would have been edgy from the outset, reading the women as tightwads, resentful that her time was being wasted.

Luis, a widower, was again amazed at how unlike his babies were. He walked across the dusty, pocked lot to the road. Highway 307 was the north-south thoroughfare that paralleled the Caribbean, stretching from Cancún to the Belize border. Two lanes of blacktop, it slashed through the scrub jungle and flat-as-a-tortilla limestone shelf that was Yucatán.

Luis frequently studied the highway. He was analyzing the economy, and traffic was his economic indicator. He counted rental cars and taxis, and felt the flow. Buses, too. Tour buses especially.

Tour buses drove the highway's economy. Drivers disgorged tourists at roadside shops such as his, citing low overhead and undiscovered bargains.

In winter, wealthy *norteamericanos* fled ice and snow and swarmed to Mexico. They spent money crazily until it was gone. What didn't go for hotel suites and rich food and disco tequila

was taken at posh Cancún malls and boutiques. What was left was grabbed by highway handicraft markets who bribed drivers to cite low overhead and bring tourists to buy their undiscovered bargains in blankets and T-shirts and jewelry.

Thus Luis's problem. He was an hour south of Cancún. He could not afford to bribe drivers to stop in high season when they were filled to capacity. He could only afford to bribe them in the sweltering summer when passengers were reluctant to leave air-conditioned coaches.

A tour bus hurtled by. Window passengers squinted at him through smoked glass, sealed inside like astronauts. The slipstream rocked Luis on his heels. He held his breath to avoid the diesel stench. The squinters had already forgotten a round face, prominent cheekbones, an aquiline nose, and almond eyes brought across the Bering land bridge millennia ago. Luis Balam was a thirty-seven-year-old Yucatec Maya of average height: five-foot-two.

He headed back to his stand—rickety tables under a thatch *palapa*. There were moments when he wondered what he was going to do, what was going to become of him and his girls. This was such a moment.

The twangy Texans were walking to their rented Nissan

Tsuru. Luis noticed nothing new and shiny on their plump bodies. A beaming Joyce admired her necklace and matching earrings in a pocket mirror. Denny's ears were the color of blood, and his perfect teeth were clenched. He was tearing off and signing American Express traveler's checks, two fifties and a twenty.

One hundred and twenty U.S. dollars. Probably eighty on the necklace, forty on the earrings. Luis's floor on the necklace had been sixty, on the earrings fifteen. Environmentally responsible Denny had made their day a financial success.

In the North American custom, Luis wished Denny and Joyce to have nice days. Joyce smiled and told Luis to do the same. Denny made no comment. He was intent on ripping the door off their rental vehicle when he opened it and on creating a limestone duststorm when he stepped on the gas.

They were in a yellow Geo Tracker, which Luis thought of as a small Jeep with sexy curves. It looked brand new, but Denny was aging it fast, thudding through potholes and bounding onto the highway.

After the Geo was gone, Ester said, "Father, something flew out."

When it came to a sale, Rosa had the talons, but the raptor

eyes in the family belonged to Ester. "What? Where?"

"I don't know what. It was brown. It was in a pocket in the door and flew into the brush by where they parked."

Ester was already wading into the dense, low thicket. Luis told her to be careful of snakes just as she produced a leather wallet. She laid it on a table next to a tray of rings and asked, "What do we do, Father?"

"Wait for him to come for it. Nothing else."

But he didn't. Not that day. The Balams packed the wallet with their merchandise and went home to their village. Denny didn't return the next day either, not by midday, a day so far devoid of paying customers.

Behind the stand in the dubious shade of a straggly palm they prepared lunch. Ester slapped masa dough into tortillas, and Rosa fried them on a griddle. Luis dispensed sodas for them from a Styrofoam ice chest, a bottle of Leon Negra beer for himself. The ice had long since melted, so the cooling was psychological rather than actual.

They ate in folding aluminum chairs. Luis had placed the wallet on the ground between the girls.

"Who wants to look?"

"Ester should. She saw it."

"We wouldn't have the wallet

unless Rosa had made him angry."

Ester, age eighteen, was quiet and serious. She wore the traditional Maya *huipil*, a gaily embroidered white dress. Rosa, age sixteen, favored bluejeans and neon tops. She was addicted to cola beverages and North American rock music. They were as unselfish as they were different.

"All right, I will," Luis said.

Luis checked for currency. None. He unfolded the clear plastic and had to stand so the end didn't drag. He removed the driver's licenses first. There was one from the North American state of Montana with Denny's yellow-haired, blue-eyed face on it. It was issued to Charles R. Dennis. The Iowa license, identical photograph, belonged to Dennis N. Charles. In the state of California he was J. Dennis Morrison, in Michigan J. D. Dennison. He drove in the state of Maryland as Denny L. Daggett.

Luis passed them around.

"Father, their states, are they like ours?" Rosa asked. "Like Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Campeche?"

"I think so," Luis said.

"Do you need a license in every North American state you drive in?" Ester asked.

Before Luis could answer, Rosa asked, "Do you have to

have a name for every state you live in?"

"I don't think so," Luis said, although he had no way of being sure.

He removed the *plástica*, took out the Visas and MasterCard, and matched them to the driver's licenses as if playing a game of cards.

"So who is Denny?"

"Father, the traveler's checks," Ester said.

Luis brought a metal box from under a table and took out two days' receipts, meager but for Denny's purchase.

"I was going in to the bank today. These are signed by Dennis Doyle."

"I checked his passport, Father."

"I know you did, Rosa," Luis said, looking at the passport numbers under his endorsements.

"He is all these people," Ester said. "Who is he?"

Luis searched every compartment of the wallet. There were first names and phone numbers written on scraps of paper. There were four-digit numbers on slips of paper. There was a bar chit for sixty pesos signed by D. Doyle, Room 811.

"The Cancún Maya InterPresidential," Luis said. "I will ask him who he is. If he isn't anybody, the checks will not clear."

Ester's fingers danced on a

pocket calculator. "One hundred and twenty dollars is nine hundred pesos."

"It is your turn to be careful of snakes, Father," Rosa said.

Luis had bought his VW Beetle from a Cancún rental-car agency. Its running gear had been shellshocked on rough roads, its engine malnourished on eighty-one octane gasoline. The oxidized blue paint was the hue of the exhaust smoke. Luis kept it running with bicycle tools and intuition. He knew he would soon need magic.

With more and more dump trucks lumbering about, the trip into Cancún was slower every time. It seemed to Luis that one half of Yucatán was being excavated and moved to the other half.

The fastest, fiercest development was on Cancún, a skinny island shaped like a seven. Its skyline cast shadows early and late in the day that were to Luis like eclipses. Cancún was called *gringolandia*, and its official bird was said to be the construction crane. Luis Balam had never decided if that was funny or not.

The Cancún Maya InterPresidential was among the newest and grandest of the hotels. It was a mock Maya temple, a pyramid of stone and glass with waterfalls cascading down the front face and satellite dishes

sprouting on the manicured grounds like extraterrestrial mushrooms.

Luis parked in the farthest corner of the lot and rummaged in his trunk for a plumber's helper. With it in hand he entered a lobby so chilled his skin tingled. An unfamiliar Maya wandering around in a hotel where anglos paid two hundred U.S. dollars and beyond per night was immediately suspect. With the plunger he was an Indian sent to unplug a toilet. He had rendered himself invisible.

Joyce answered at room 811, looked at Luis, then at the plunger that rested on his shoulder like a rifle barrel. In the background was loud music, guitars and drums and lyrics in a language that was possibly English.

"We don't have a problem in the bath—"

"I have Denny's wallet."

"Oh my God. He'll be so relieved." She held out a hand.

"Is he here?"

"No. Wait, I'm sorry, now I recognize you. You're the shopkeeper. I absolutely love the jewelry. I told Denny it might've fallen out of the car. I've seen him put it in the map pocket of the door, but he said no, he hadn't. He had other ideas. In fact, that's where he is, looking for it. I can hold it for him."

Luis said, "I need to talk to him."

She sighed. "Well, I can pay you a reward."

Joyce wore a blue top and shorts, the identical color of her eyes. He also couldn't help but notice that her toenails and fingernails were painted the same color as her lipstick. Luis wondered if this is what they did when they didn't jog and run—carefully decorate themselves. At this range he could see brown roots at the base of her yellow hair and smell cigarettes in it. He didn't reply.

"I'm sorry. I insulted you. Please come on in. Girls, turn down the TV, please. Why are you carrying that thing?"

Luis answered by setting down the plunger after he closed the door behind him. It was a nice room with two large beds and dressers and a color TV. Through drawn drapes, he knew, was a balcony, and what the tourists paid so dearly for, the white sand, blue sky, and bluer water.

On one of the beds, side by side, were two younger versions of Joyce: small noses, long legs, and pale hair. They were transfixed by the source of the noise, screaming and shirtless young men on a light-throbbing stage. Luis knew from Rosa that this was the *norteamericano* MTV.

"Girls, turn it down. Kelli and

Kimmi, this is—what is your name?"

"Luis Balam."

The girls turned it down but paid no attention otherwise to Luis or their mother. They were graduated like Ester and Rosa, but two or three years younger, and had teeth-straightening wire in their mouths.

Joyce said, "They've had their fill of the sun. After a week, you burn out. Literally. By the way, Denny was mad at me, not you. My enthusiasm ruined his wheeling and dealing for him. I apologize for his behavior."

"All right."

"You speak terrific English."

"I have to."

"And that darling little girl. Your daughter?"

"Yes."

"Funny. Her English improved as negotiations went on."

Luis smiled.

"Denny has an ego, and he has a temper. He came unglued yesterday evening when he realized the wallet was gone. He thinks somebody took it. He has these friends. He thinks they took it or somebody broke into the car when he was with them."

"It fell out when he got in."

"And nearly slammed the door off the hinges. Denny wouldn't believe he did something that stupid. He thinks anything that happens to him, somebody else is responsible, is screwing him."

Luis had the wallet in a back pocket, except for the driver's licenses, which were in the other. He showed them to Joyce.

"Who is he?"

"He's Denny Doyle. I didn't know anything about this."

Her hands were trembling. Luis believed her.

"Is Denny Doyle coming back soon?"

"Come to think of it, he carries this wallet around but never uses it. He wears a money belt for checks and passport. Or should I say passports? Plural."

"I have to know if his checks are good," Luis said.

"Girls, I have to go out. Make sure that—"

"—we're locked in," Kelli and Kimmi chimed, pointing at a door beside the television.

Joyce said she might know where Denny was and asked Luis to drive since Denny had the Geo. Joyce also asked if Luis cared if she smoked. She said the girls threw a tizzy fit if she lit up in the room. Anglos always asked to smoke while they were flicking their lighters. Luis said the windows were down, he didn't mind.

"Do you know the Mega Race and Sports Book?"

"No."

"Take a right. I can find it. It's the only place in Cancún he's taken me outside the hotel except a disco. Him and his friends

spend a lot of time and money there. Denny's dropped a bundle."

"Why does Denny think his friends stole his wallet?"

"He thinks they were messing with his mind. He thinks they're setting him up to burn him. Some friends, huh?"

Luis followed Joyce into a big square building. Luis and his girls lived in a one room cinder block house with a thatch roof. It had no plumbing but had electrical service. Cords stretched from the junction to a bare light-bulb and a tiny black and white television. The color TV screens in this sports bar, however, were as wide as buses, and they filled the walls. Glistening brown giants slammed basketballs into goals, and white men in baggy clothing and ice skates were playing a kind of *fútbol* with sticks.

Joyce took an openmouthed Luis by the arm and outside. "They haven't seen him," she said, lighting a cigarette. "He's stayed out late before, but he's always back in the morning. I'm worried."

"Where do his friends stay?"

"That's the thing. I don't know them. I've never seen them. They're not really friends. They're business associates."

"What business?"

"I knew you were going to ask. Look, Denny and I don't own

each other. I tend bar, he comes in, we date, you know, but we don't live together or anything. For the past couple of years he's been taking us to Cancún. Three times a year. He claims to be nuts about the girls, but he ignores them. I don't think Denny's that way, but I remind them to lock the adjoining room where he sleeps in case he doesn't ignore them, know what I'm saying? Me too when we're here. I sleep in the room with the girls, but tippy-toe into his for awhile after they're asleep if he's here and he wants me to. I tippy-toe right back out if I don't like what I smell on him."

"Alcohol?"

"Woman. Sorry. I'm running off at the mouth without answering your question. No, I don't know what business."

"I have to know if the checks are good," Luis said. "If Denny is somebody else, I am not paid, and maybe the police talk to me."

"I'm sure they—well, half an hour ago I was sure they were good. I'd pay you if I could. I can give you the jewelry back."

"No," Luis said.

"Look, is there somewhere we can go where I can clear my head and think, somewhere that isn't wall-to-wall people?"

If her head would clear and Denny's head appeared, Luis would take her anywhere. She

said surprise her; he drove southward.

Three cigarettes later, Joyce said, "This Jewish girl and Italian boy got married. Most of the families on both sides boycotted the wedding. Then they all went on *Oprah*."

Luis was confused.

Joyce laughed. "I've had my fill of sun, too. The girls and I fight over the TV like cats and dogs."

Luis had his tank filled at the Tulum Pemex and didn't object when Joyce paid. They drove inland on a road straight as a ruler, past scatterings of small houses with thatched roofs, some stuccoed, some with walls of lashed saplings. Waist-high stone walls enclosed gardens.

"All that's missing are barbecues and minivans in driveways," Joyce said.

They parked in a dusty lot occupied by three other cars. Luis said, "If this was Tulum, there would be no parking room. Tulum can get twenty buses by ten in the morning."

"The signs said Cobá."

"Cobá was a Classic Maya city," Luis said. "Fifteen hundred years ago there were six thousand buildings and forty thousand people. We'll climb the tallest one left and clear your head."

"All I see is jungle. Where did the Maya go?"

"We haven't gone anywhere."

Luis paid admission at the ticket booth. Five minutes from the entrance they came upon a steep, irregular pyramid outlined in neon blue.

Joyce took a deep breath. "It's so hot my eyes sting. Are we climbing this?"

"No. This is *La Iglesia*. The Church. Eighty feet high, just a baby."

The path was wide and flat, crowded by vegetation. Half an hour later they came to a clearing and a unruly pile of limestone blocks that pierced the sky.

"Don't tell me," she said.

"*Nohoch Mul* or *El Castillo*. The Castle. Twelve stories, highest in Mexican Yucatán. You have to go to Guatemala to Tikal for taller. Come on."

"What's the secret to survival?"

"Lean forward and don't look down." At the top Luis helped Joyce turn around and sit. Her clothing clung to her, and she was taking in air in huge gulps.

"Do you run?" he asked.

"Run where?"

"On the beach? On the boulevard?"

She coughed and said, "You gotta be kidding. Impressive place, but I can understand why Cobá isn't crawling with tourists."

They sat and gazed out at ver-

dant flatness. Luis said, "Those bumps you see, they aren't hills, they're unexcavated ruins."

Joyce said, "Have you ever seen old American TV series?"

Luis didn't know how this was getting them any closer to Denny. "*Isla de Gilligan*."

"*Leave It to Beaver*?"

He had seen nature shows on birds and cats, but none on a large rat. "No."

"Well, I think I've finally got ol' Denny figured out. Not that I couldn't've a long time ago, with or without your bulletin on his fake I.D.'s. If I hadn't've had my head buried in the sand, that is.

"Ward and June Cleaver and their two boys were the most adorable family you ever laid your eyes on. People see Denny and me and my girls, it's the same reaction. We're pretty, perky, button-nosed, apple pie, all-American folk."

Luis said nothing.

"Our last trip home from Cancún, it should have registered. We go through Dallas-Fort Worth, and the weather was lousy. Thunderstorms and bad visibility had schedules screwed up. About six overseas flights arrived at the customs gate at once. There was an incredible line inside, eight wide and as deep as it could go. They had supervisors on platforms, scanning the crowd, looking to break up the bottleneck. One came up to

us and asked if we were together. We said yeah, and he walked us right through. Just like that. Right then I realized nobody had even given us a second glance, let alone open a piece of our luggage. I've seen some people who maybe didn't look, well, quite as wholesome as us, people who weren't traveling with kids, and they'd tear their suitcases apart."

Luis thought he understood. "I hear stories. There are little airstrips deep in Yucatán. Torches are lit at night so they can be found by the pilots."

"Denny's been renting us for that Cleaver family look. I could blame it entirely on him and call him a dirty rotten no-good son of a bitch."

Luis thought that's what she *was* doing, but he looked at her and saw tears streaming down tanned cheeks.

"I always made sure the girls and I carried *our own* bags. Never ever his. My subconscious knew the truth. How many single mothers can afford three vacations to Cancún per year?"

Another unanswerable question. Luis shrugged.

"Do you ever put your daughters' safety on the line? What does Balam stand for? Is it Spanish?"

Three questions, answerable, though oddly bunched. "Balam

is Yucatec Maya for jaguar. Safety, I don't understand. I taught them to look out for snakes that have legs and snakes that do not."

"Well, okay, that's all you can do. Their futures. What do you see ahead for them?"

"There is a lot more a Maya can't do than can do. For a Maya girl, even less. I don't want them to have to scrub Cancún toilets. I don't want them to marry young to farmers and be baby machines. Working with me, selling, that is not good but it is not bad."

"Jaguar. My."

"There is a half page of Balam in the Mérida telephone book. Balam in Yucatán is like your Smeeth. If Denny's checks are good, it is a good day for us. If they are bad, it is not."

In the car, before starting back, Luis said, "Maybe you and your daughters should go home now."

"My thoughts, too. Denny comes in at all hours, but never as late as the next day. I already said that, didn't I? If Denny has trouble, it could rub off on us. Trouble is, he keeps the tickets, and I don't have a key to his room. We can lock him out and vice versa."

"Before I forget," she added, "I want to apologize for Denny calling your daughter Chiquita."

"Her name is Rosa."

"The point is, he was making a racial slur against Hispanics."

"If he wants to insult who we are, he should call us *indio*."

"If I ever see the bastard again, I'll be sure to tell him. He's a storehouse of knowledge like that."

"You should just go," Luis said. "However you can."

"I know. I'll call my sister, see if she'll wire us money."

"I will wait outside while you pack. I will drive you to the airport."

"In this car?"

"Many Mexico City taxi drivers drive *bochitos*, too. I've heard stories. They can load entire families including the fat grandmother."

"If you say so. I wish I could pay you. I'll mail you the hundred and twenty bucks and something extra. When I can."

"I will go to the bank with the checks and see what happens."

"Not a bit of cash in the wallet, huh?"

"No."

"Where is it?"

Luis pointed at the glove box.

"Can I look?"

Luis nodded.

Joyce dug through the compartments and examined the scraps of paper.

"Bingo," she said.

"Bingo?"

"Maybe, Luis. Just maybe."

She didn't offer to explain her

bingo and her maybes. He waited for over an hour in front of the hotel. They came out awkwardly, lurching, hurrying with suitcases. Joyce's eyes were wide, and her daughters were pouting.

"No Denny?" Luis asked.

"No Denny."

"You waited for him?"

"Hell no. We were late for another reason. I'll explain at the airport. God, you *can* fit a family in a Beetle."

"Ouch," Kimmi said to Kelli. "You're putting my leg to sleep."

"Get your armpit out of my face. Whew! Gross."

"More or less," Joyce amended.

At Cancún International, they unloaded. Joyce said, "Girls, while I say goodbye to Mr. Balam and thank him, please wait at the curb. Stay together and don't speak—"

"—to strangers."

Joyce stuffed a thick wad of currency in his shirt pocket.

"It took a little trial and error," she said, grinning. "Determining which card was which. Those four-digit numbers are PIN's."

"Pins?"

"No, PIN's. As in ATM."

"I said pins."

"That's right. PIN's."

She kissed him on the cheek, said what the hell, kissed him hard on the lips, big perfect teeth clacking against his, and was gone.

Luis looked at the wad of hundred peso notes and tore Denny's traveler's checks into tiny pieces. Halfway home he stopped and smelled the crisp new notes. Then he held them up to the fading daylight. They seemed too perfect. They didn't seem quite real, but he supposed they were.

Why pay for cellular phone service if you only want it for emergency use?

The SOS Phone offers a 24-hour call center to connect you with your emergency roadside service, 911 service or family members in the event of an emergency.



The SOS Phone gives you instant access to the emergency service you need, from towing to 911, even a family member or friend.



What does it do? With the touch of a button, the SOS Phone connects me to the roadside emergency service of my choice, a 911 service or a trained SOS operator, 24 hours a day. If I need help, I know it's just a phone call away.

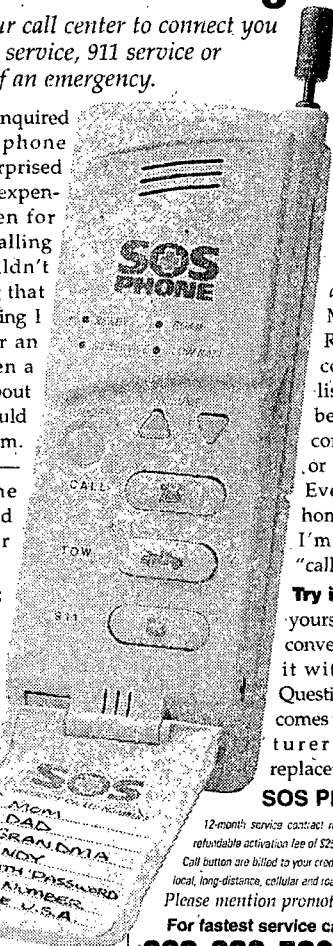
Emergency assistance.

By pressing the "tow" button, I'll be instantly connected to my emergency roadside service provider. Or, if I don't have one, the SOS operator can recommend one and dispatch them immediately.

The "911" button connects me to the 911 emergency service in my area—best of all, the call is absolutely free!

Last month, I inquired about cellular phone service. I was surprised to find out how expensive it was, even for the most basic calling plans! I just couldn't justify spending that much for something I only wanted for an emergency. Then a friend told me about a product that would solve my problem. It's the SOS Phone—a cellular phone service designed exclusively for emergency use!

What does it



Personalized service. Each SOS Phone has a serial number that is recorded at the Call Center. Each time I use my phone, the operators will know it's me calling, and will greet me by name. My SOS Emergency Record will appear on the computer screen with my list of 10 most-used numbers and the operator will connect me with the person or emergency service I need. Even if I just want to call home to tell my husband that I'm running late, with the "call" button, I can!





Try it yourself. Why not try it yourself? If you don't enjoy its convenience and security, return it within 90 days for a "No Questions Asked" refund. It also comes with a three-year manufacturer's limited repair or replacement warranty.

SOS Phone . . . \$99 \$12 S&H

12-month service contract required for this price. Requires a one-time non-refundable activation fee of \$25 and a monthly charge of \$9.95. Calls made on the Call button are billed to your credit card at \$1.45 per minute. (That rate includes all local, long-distance, cellular and roaming fees.) For outgoing calls only.

Please mention promotional code **1788-10713**

For fastest service call toll-free 24 hours a day

800-238-5322    

comtradindustries

2820 Waterford Lake Drive, Suite 102 Midlothian, VA 23113

FICTION

NEITHER RHYME NOR RIOT

K. R.
MacLeish

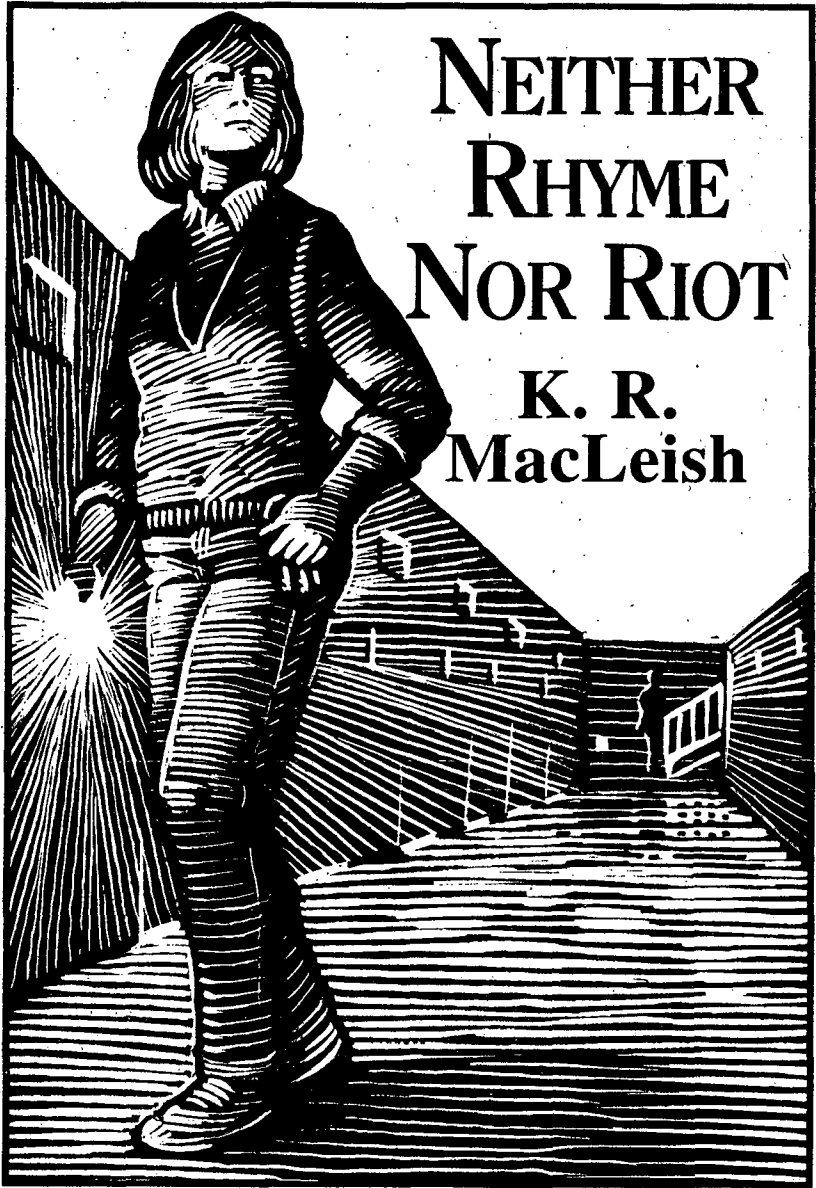


Illustration by Tim Foley

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine 6/97

“Can you make someone die by wishing him dead?” Corrections Sergeant Frieda Ferguson twisted a plastic ballpoint pen between white-knuckled fingers. “How can he blame me for something that happened on my weekend off? I don’t get it.”

The pen snapped in two. “Ah! What a scrawny neck you have, Harry.” Frieda tossed the pieces over her shoulder in the general direction of the wastebasket. “Do I provoke him somehow, or does he hate me on general principles? My shift supervisor. He’s supposed to be on my side, but he’s more of a threat to me than my houseful of criminals would even want to be. Bah!” She threw her hands in the air. “What a bass-ackward way to run a prison.”

Frieda was slender, not very tall. More than a few white strands showed in her short brown hair. She was dressed neatly in jeans, shirt, and sweater vest. Jogging and working out kept her weight down and her strength up, and she felt confident and competent in her job as housing officer in the minimum security correctional facility. Jogging was also supposed to relieve stress, so why was she feeling so stressed?

“It only happens to people who let themselves get pushed around,” Hendricks said. “Har-

ry’s a pervert. When you gonna start fighting back?” Officer Hendricks was slouched in the orange plastic upholstered chair on the other side of Frieda’s desk, one booted foot atop his other knee. “He’s got the hots for you, and he’s trying to get your attention. You know, the old pig-tail in the inkwell trick.”

“Phooey! He’s destroying my career.”

“For twenty-five thou I’ll waste the S.O.B. for you.” Hendricks took a long swallow from a can of soda that boasted *Twice the Caffeine*. His heavy leather jacket hung open, exposing a Harley Davidson motif on a black T-shirt over an ample chest and belly. A walkie-talkie was attached to one side of his studded belt. A ring of ten or fifteen keys on a metal clip, with another ring of a dozen or so swinging freely beneath them, was fastened to his belt on the other side. “Twenty-five’s a good price for a hit, ain’t it? With that much cash I could ride away from this eff-hole.”

Frieda snorted. “Couldn’t tell you,” she said. “But we’d both be in the hoosegow before you could get out of town.”

Hendricks drained his can and hunched forward, wiping his sandy mustache and beard with a beefy hand. He stared hard at her. “Where are you now?” he asked.

Frieda took a deep breath. "Ahh yes," she said. "Work Furlough in reverse." She shuddered, shaking away the mood. "I'd better go count my chickens," she said, rising from the battered chair. "You know, it's been really weird in here tonight. I've been whining about my past problems, but I may have some future ones." She searched through the desk drawer for another pen, took up a clipboard and flashlight, waited at the office door for the patrol officer to come out, then carefully locked it.

"Weird how?"

"It's so quiet. Eyes move, but mouths don't. Maybe this reprimand has me paranoid, but I feel like I'm going to step into a trap that everyone knows about but me."

"You want me to stay?"

"Nah, I'm probably just oversensitive."

"I'll stop again in a little while. Watch your back, Freddie." Hendricks gave her a thumbs-up sign and stomped out into the frosty night. He would patrol the grounds and look in on other housing officers, checking back with Frieda more often than usual.

The time was two A.M. Or, more properly, zero two hundred hours.

Frieda entered the TV room. Three men who had been talk-

ing quietly fell silent and watched television with blank, bored expressions. The glow from the screen was the only light in the room. Frieda watched them ignore her, a faint smile in her eyes. She noted their presence with little checkmarks on the chart on her clipboard. Without looking up she said, "My calculator does that when I move it away from the window."

Three faces turned toward her. "Say what?" said Manny, the man closest to Frieda:

"Fade blank."

The men relaxed somewhat, but Frieda could feel the tension. Or was it expectation?

"Uh, hi-ya, Fred," said Otis, who sat in back. He called her Fred Fergustone and was doing his Barney imitation.

Why not? "Yabba dabba doo," Frieda said softly, and made a point of looking at her wristwatch. At two o'clock the men were supposed to be in their rooms.

Frieda went from one door to another, raising the privacy curtain that covered the small glass window to observe the man within. If the room was dark, she shone her flashlight beam on the sleeping form. Number six was empty, door open, light on. Otis's room.

Each resident cottage had approximately the same floor

plan. The day room was at one end of a central corridor, the dining area at the other end. Six inmate rooms, a bathroom, and the office lined the downstairs corridor. A stairway at each end gave access to the second floor with nineteen inmate rooms and two bathrooms.

Frieda checked the rear exit and basement doors to see that they were secure, then went upstairs, taking care to make no noise.

She wore rubber-soled running shoes and held her keys tightly so they wouldn't jingle. She stopped at the top and listened to the faint sound of a door closing. Stepping from the lighted stairwell into gloom, she scanned the hall. Nothing moved.

In number fifteen, Homer sat at his desk braiding cornrows in his hair. He winked at Frieda in the mirror. Frieda marveled at the perfection of the hairstyle—tiny braids, perfectly straight partings. Aha. She remembered the sound she'd heard. Homer hadn't been doing this by himself. She moved to the open door of the bathroom next to Homer's room and rapped twice—her code, which meant *call out your room number or I'll come in to see who you are*.

"Twenty," said a voice from within one of the three stalls.

"Thanks." Frieda finished

counting and waited outside room twenty.

In a few minutes a young man shuffled from the bathroom in rubber shower thongs clutching his striped cotton robe, which didn't quite cover knobby knees and bowed legs.

Frieda stood aside while he unlocked his door. Benny was young—barely eighteen, short, with a slight build, almost delicate. His face wore what Frieda called his clown look. His dark eyes held fear and resignation mingled with hope, and Frieda wondered what his childhood had been like. She wanted to move him to a room downstairs where he might be a little safer, but the security supervisors had denied her request. Frieda wasn't surprised. She had observed a pattern of behavior among the staff that allowed homosexual violence to occur, then "busted" it with anti-gay violence of their own. She tried not to worry about Benny. This was minimum security. These men were on the honor system, preparing for release.

Benny looked brightly at Frieda, his clown smile pasted on.

"You do neat work, Benny," she said. "Nice straight lines." Benny's smile stayed in place while his eyes grew sad. He'd been busted. The rules didn't allow one inmate to visit another's room after ten P.M.

Frieda left him standing there to ponder his transgression and went back to room fifteen. She knocked and opened the door in one quick movement. "You can finish by yourself?"

"I ain't makin' no noise," Homer said, grinning broadly. His television set flashed silent pictures, the sound turned completely off. Although he pretended innocence, Homer knew that Frieda was referring to his hair.

"You should've asked first, Homer. Tomorrow night when you get in from work, we need to talk." Homer worked an evening shift in a restaurant in the nearby city. He had all day to fix his hair.

Frieda ran lightly down the stairs into the TV room. She sat down in a chair that gave her a view of the length of the hall and waited patiently. It was past two now, and the three men were not yet in their rooms. Frieda didn't like to remind them. She wanted them to discipline themselves, but now and then they would test her. She could be patient.

The three men rose as one and walked out. Otis went to the bathroom down the hall. Manny and John plodded upstairs.

Frieda turned off the television as the phone in the office began to ring. "Ferguson, Five," she said into the phone.

"Where the hell you been?" It

was Officer Ron Aikens in the security office. "I been callin' for half an hour."

"Counting," Frieda said shortly. Half hour, my foot.

"Me 'n' the lieutenant was worried somethin' happened to you."

"And you weren't here to watch, oh my."

"Your safety is our first concern," Ron said sweetly.

"Horsefeathers. What do you want?"

"What every man-jack in this institution and the world at large wants, baby."

Frieda waited without comment.

"Tenant wants a special count," Ron said finally. "Make sure you see skin, not just humps." He cackled wickedly. "Bet you see a lot of humps when you're counting." He hung up, cutting off his own bellow of laughter.

Clipboard in hand again, Frieda opened wide both glass-paneled doors of the empty TV room and turned on the lights, then ran upstairs. Manny and John walked slowly toward their rooms from the bathroom, toothbrushes in hand.

"Night, Miss Frieda," said the older man. John had a quiet manner, always courteous. He'd been in the system for a long time. Frieda knew he had committed several murders, but he

did his time calmly and had been given trustee status in other more secure institutions. His quiet manner had finally earned him the privilege of minimum security custody.

John entered his room and closed the door. He was a ruthless man in many ways. Ruthless but honorable, Frieda felt. According to his reputation, he never interfered in any man's business unless that man attempted to cheat or betray him; and he would never betray a friend even to save himself. Many a security officer had tried to get John sent back to a more secure institution. Some had even tried to set him up. So far, he'd been too clever for them.

Frieda respected John and was not afraid of him. She thought how frighteningly ironic it was that she should feel less threat from twenty-four felons led by a man like John than from some of her co-workers and superiors. The inmates were all definitely more courteous, she thought, recalling Ron Aikens' crude suggestion. And sadly, Ron wasn't the only officer who acted that way towards the women officers. He was the most boorish, though. Lieutenant Almost was treacherous but not obnoxious.

Manny hesitated outside the door to his room and watched

her with hooded eyes. "Special count?"

She met his eyes briefly, nodded, and continued along the hall, carefully checking each room and marking her chart.

Manny followed. "Something happen?"

"I don't know yet," Frieda said. Her eyes held his for a moment, then slid to the intercom box staring like a cyclops from the wall. From the security office the supervisors could listen in to the cottages to determine whether an officer needed assistance, since their only means of communication was the telephone in the office. Lieutenant Almost listened so he could hear something he could use against an officer. Almost didn't work with his subordinates, he waged war on them.

Manny winked. He always knew everything that was happening in the entire institution. Whatever had prompted the special count, Frieda was sure he knew all about it.

Frieda hoped she wouldn't be blamed for whatever it was. Hendricks was right. She should start fighting back. She'd call a union rep in the morning. She wondered how wars were won if military officers also treated their subordinates and the enemy as one.

John's door was open about four inches. No light showed.

She had watched him enter just minutes before, but she shone her flashlight through the glass panel. He was fully clothed, sitting on the edge of his bed, hunched forward, his hands between his knees. He didn't look up.

Downstairs in his room Otis waited for her, his door open. He had put pink foam rollers in his hair and covered it with a plastic cap. "Walk on cat feet," he said softly.

"I try." Frieda reached to close the door.

"Cat feet," he repeated, looking grave.

She frowned and nodded.

"Night, Fred," Otis said.

"Night, Barney."

Otis was warning her to protect herself, to watch her back, just as Hendricks had. Something was going to happen, and Otis, John, and Manny knew about it.

She telephoned her count to Ron Aikens in the security office. "Twenty-five present, twenty-five total."

"Tenant's sending an officer to your house," Ron said. "To help out," he added sarcastically.

"Good."

"Good? I thought you liked to be alone with your twenty-five *veer-isle* men."

"How would I notice a flyspeck in the pepper?" Frieda hung up,

and the phone rang again immediately.

It was Ed in Cottage Nine. "What's the special count for, you know?" As usual, Ed was munching on something. "Wait a minute," he said before she could reply. Then, "Hendricks just came in. He said there's a van in the parking lot that wasn't there when Vehicle Patrol last checked. Nobody in it, in the front anyway. They can't see in the back. You okay?" he asked. "You're not saying much."

"Ron said Harry's sending me a man."

"Hoo! He's not coming himself? I'd think he'd be right there to protect you if he thinks there's going to be trouble." Ed paused. "Or to do you in. Come to think of it, I'm never sure which it is that he wants. Does he love you or hate you?" When Frieda didn't answer he added, "You're awfully quiet tonight. You sure you're okay?" he asked again.

"I'm listening."

"To what?"

"Nothing. Total silence. This place has been holding its breath since I got here. When we all start to breathe, you'll think it's a tornado."

"You've got a sixth sense. I'd be too spooked to go upstairs if I was that tuned in. I'd have to come in soused every night like old George."

"How could you save yourself if you were soused?"

"At least I wouldn't feel the shiv when it plunged into my back."

"I'm going to cruise the halls, Ed. If doomsday is creeping up, I want to be out there where I can see it." Frieda rang off.

The lights were still on in the TV room. Frieda shut them off and stood, invisible, behind the door, listening. Through the windows she could see the road and several other cottages. She saw the patrol vehicle stop and discharge Lieutenant Almost. Heaven help me, she prayed.

The cottage door opened and creaked shut on its closing mechanism. Hidden behind the door, she watched the lieutenant step into the hall. He was short, a little overweight, and full of his own importance. He had a wife who was some kind of public official, and teenage children. He was at least ten years younger than Frieda, who would never see forty-four again. Ed and Hendricks were right about Harry Almost's ambivalence. He vacillated between protecting her and persecuting her, both of which caused her to lose credibility on the job. What have I done to deserve such devotion? she wondered.

Harry looked both ways without seeing Frieda, went to the office door, and, finding it

locked, continued toward the dining room and into the back hall. Frieda ran swiftly up the front stairs while Almost panted heavily up the back stairs. She ducked into the nearest bathroom and listened to the swish, swish of cloth rubbing cloth on heavy thighs as Almost walked along the hall.

The phone began ringing in the office downstairs. Frieda stepped into the hall directly in front of Almost. "Lieutenant," she said in a respectful greeting, smiling at his startled look. Before he could speak, she wheeled and ran lightly down to the office and the ringing telephone.

It was Ron. "If 'tenant's there, tell him that Sam in Two thinks he saw something moving through the woods in back, heading your way. Expecting someone?"

"I'll tell him," Frieda said flatly.

Ron hooted. "He's there? That sly mother . . . Said he was going to Ten." Frieda held the phone toward the lieutenant, who had followed her into the office. Ron's voice was clearly audible in the small room.

Almost took the receiver, then held up his hand as Frieda started to leave the office. She waited in the doorway listening, not to the phone conversation but to the silence in the building.

The clock said two fifty A.M.

A door slammed, the sound echoing through the quiet. Angry voices blasted forth, spewing filth as the speakers assaulted one another with words. Another door slammed. The sound of blows, flesh against flesh, grunts, and the sound of scuffling rose amid the curses.

Frieda made a movement toward the stairs, but Almost leaped up and grabbed her arm. He threw her back towards the office door and scuttled up the stairs. Off balance, Frieda struck her head on the corner of the door jamb. She blinked and rubbed her face, trying to force away the cold blackness that threatened to engulf her.

Something about this disturbance bothered her. Something seemed unnatural, out of sync. But her head hurt, she was having trouble focusing her eyes, and she wasn't able to identify the thing that puzzled her.

Ron phoned again. "Tenant hung up on me. You having a party there or what?"

"Send some muscle with cuffs, Ron." Frieda was annoyed. Ron should be on the radio getting help. Unless the same thing was happening in every cottage. That would be interesting, she thought vaguely, stifling a giggle. She was beginning to feel nauseated, and concentrated on controlling the spasms in her throat.

The disturbance was moving downstairs. Lieutenant Almost shouted, "Get help!" Frieda looked out the door in time to see a powerful black fist ram toward a frizzy blond face. The face ducked. The fist hit Almost in the head, the force of the blow raising his feet off the stair. He sailed down and across the hall, where his head struck the wall. He fell heavily to the floor and lay still.

In the silence that followed, Frieda stared at the two men. Strangers. They didn't live in Cottage Five. That's what had seemed wrong—Frieda hadn't recognized the voices. She wondered if anyone upstairs was hurt. Should she check? Should she guard the lieutenant? Should she protect herself? She mentally flipped a three-sided coin. It evaporated in the air. To her astonishment, like twin jesters, one black, one white, the two men winked in unison, gave the thumbs-up sign, and walked quickly down the hall. Frieda heard the back door close. They would disappear into the woods behind the cottage.

Frieda looked at the clock in the hall. Only about five minutes had passed since the first door had slammed upstairs. She shook her head in disbelief and winced at the pain, then knelt to check the lieutenant's pulse.

Otis came from his room

yawning and stopped some distance from where Harry Almost lay. "Dead?" he asked.

Frieda moved her head carefully from side to side.

"Too bad." He returned to his room and closed the door.

"That van pulled out about five minutes ago," Aikens said nervously when Frieda called to order an ambulance. "Same time the crap started in your house. What the hell is going on?"

"When you find out, let me know," Frieda said flatly. "Get someone in here to watch the lieutenant. I'm going upstairs to see if there's any damage."

Frieda checked every room, opening each door and speaking the name of the man inside. If there was no response, she turned the light on and shook the man awake. Some had actually slept through the noise. She opened John's door. "John?"

"Take care, Miss Frieda," he said from the darkness.

When she reached Manny's door, before she could speak he asked, "He dead?"

Frieda paused. "No," she told him. She finished checking the rooms and went downstairs. No one was hurt. There was no damage. The entire fight had been a put-on. An act. And Otis, John, and Manny were deliberately letting her know that they knew about it. It didn't make

sense. Why take such a risk? It could've been, might still be, murder.

Officer Hendricks was squatting near the lieutenant, his fingers lightly holding Almost's wrist. When he saw Frieda, he stood and, grinning wickedly, drew back one large booted foot, aiming it toward the lieutenant's head. He shrugged and said, "You okay? You look kind of green." He looked closer. "There's blood on your face. Were you in the fight?"

"Lieutenant threw me aside. Cracked my head against the corner here." Frieda put her hand to her head. "Wow, nice lump."

"Better let the medics look at you," Hendricks cautioned.

Ambulance attendants and two more officers clumped in. The officers went upstairs. Frieda left the lieutenant's care to the others, swallowed some aspirin, and began writing the report. "Just the facts, ma'am." The cliché from the old mystery series taunted her as she wrote, and it occurred to her that the warnings from the men had nothing to do with her safety. She had been in no danger. She'd been warned so she could protect herself from the administration by being careful what she said about the incident.

That senseless flash of insight must be from the blow to her

head, she thought. But she could see clearly how to avoid the kind of tar pit Lieutenant Almost had her trapped in. It was so simple. Everyone in the corrections business seemed to expect everyone else to be vague and clueless. She'd always tried to be sensible and reasonable. But she could be vague, and she would start now.

"Nobody's going to believe any of this," she said to Hendricks. She told him what had happened and described the men. "It was a perfectly staged drama. Choreographed, actually, like a dance. I don't believe it myself. And I was here for the previews." She didn't mention the subtle warnings from Otis and the others. She'd already told him about her skin-crawl feelings. Frieda recalled the thumbs-up sign the two men had made and wondered for a second if Hendricks knew them and might be part of the conspiracy. But he couldn't be. This hadn't been a spur of the moment plan after their conversation earlier. "Be careful what you wish for," Frieda said, more to herself than to Hendricks. "I wonder who those men were and who organized this. I'll probably never know," she said, staring past him. Her headache was getting worse. She began filling out an injury/accident form.

"Should we be trying to find out how those two got in here?"

"You should be going to the hospital to make sure you don't have a concussion." Hendricks stepped out into the hallway and spoke briefly to the medics. "It's not our job to investigate," he reminded her. "They'll be calling the sheriff's office. If you mess up their crime scene, you'll be in trouble for sure. Almost probably unlocked the door himself so he could write you up for leaving it open. He's done it before."

"Maybe you're right. But during an alert?"

"Maybe he planned this whole thing so he could ride to the rescue and be some kind of hero for you."

"Yuk."

"Or maybe it was supposed to happen just the way it did. Could be someone meant to kill him. The man's gotta have enemies. He's done some heavy damage to a lot of officers and convicts over the years."

"If this were planned to happen to Almost, how would they know he'd be in this cottage at this time?" she asked. "Oh," she said, knowing the answer.

"What? I've been wondering that, too."

"We're so predictable. What happens when vehicle patrol finds a strange van in the lot in the middle of the night? We do a

special count, and security is doubled at most cottages."

"Aha! And who is likely to come to your cottage? Dirty Harry, of course. The whole institution would expect him to be here." He thought about it for awhile. "You know, you must have some very clever friends." Hendricks looked at her with new admiration. "Let's hope nobody else figures this out."

"Oh God. Don't even think it, Hendricks. The gossip'd have me servicing every man in here, and they'd say I'd put the guys up to bumping Almost off. If that kind of rumor gets started, they'd close this whole cottage down. And tar-and-feather me. God. I'd have to leave the state. Wouldn't that make a juicy story, though? Why are men so anxious to believe the women only work here for access to men? Do they think we're so hard up? Don't they have lives of their own? Are they just dogs? Sorry."

"No offense. You're right on all counts. Probably the deed was done for the good of society and not specially for you," Hendricks said. "I wish I'd thought of it. He may die yet."

"I was just thinking that someone could stand in the dark

in a corner of any room in here without my flashlight beam's picking him out. We really take a lot for granted."

The medics came into the office to examine Frieda's head. "Hospital," they agreed.

"Don't worry about the house, Fred," Hendricks said, following Frieda out to the ambulance. "I'll keep an eye on it. And don't come back before you're ready," he called. "The war ain't over yet. You'll need a clear head."

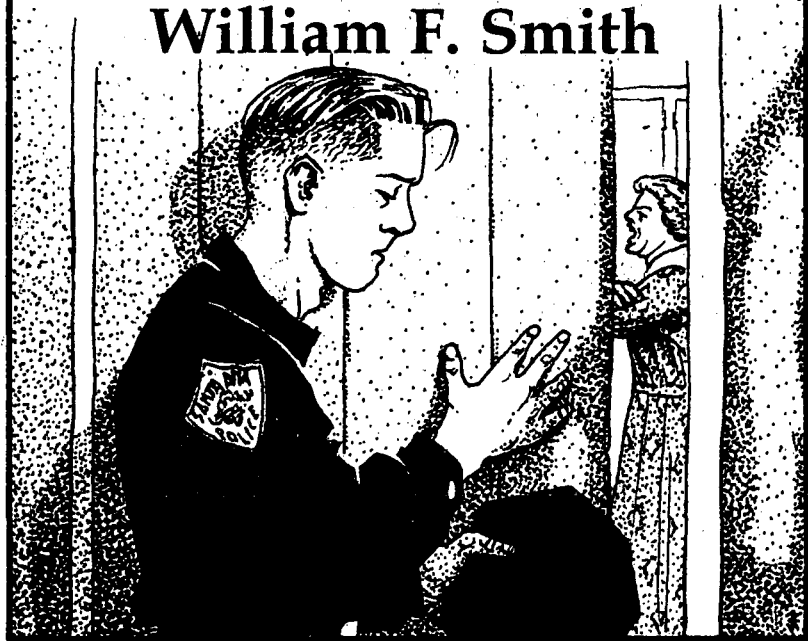
Frieda wasn't worried about the house. She'd always felt that even though security had a certain control of institutions, the inmates had the real power. They could take care of themselves. Maybe they'd explain all this to her when she got back. Or maybe not.

Otis was standing by the office door when Hendricks returned. "Fred's a good kid," he said. "But she don't know nuthin' 'bout war."

"Could be that's why she's a good kid." Hendricks looked over the reports Frieda had written, smiling at the dry, factual statements, so different from the colorful reports she usually wrote. "She's learning, man," he said. "She'll be okay."

Who Put the Poison in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder?

William F. Smith



There was a time in the distant past when Kenneth Ketchem, the internationally renowned consulting detective, was not the cantankerous octogenarian he is today but a twenty-three-year-old rookie policeman walking a beat on the

downtown streets of Santa Ana, a pleasant little city about thirty-five miles southeast of Los Angeles. In 1934 the Great Depression held the country in its unrelenting grasp, and Ketchem considered himself fortunate to have found a job he enjoyed.



On a brisk April morning, Ketchem, resplendent in his blue uniform, walked along Fourth Street toward the center of town to check in at police headquarters. He hoped Captain Bristoe wouldn't reprimand him for being late. The air was clean and invigorating. Old Saddleback in the mountains to the east loomed up so bright and clear he felt he could reach out and touch it. He glanced at his watch and increased his stride, figuring he would be about half an hour late signing in. He sighed. If Maureen Murphy hadn't smiled at him and spoken so enchantingly at breakfast, he would have left the house much earlier. He sighed again, aware he was living proof that Tennyson certainly knew his onions when he wrote: "In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." Actually Ketchem had been thinking about love ever since he'd moved into Mrs. Murphy's boardinghouse four weeks ago and cast his eyes upon her daughter.

He glanced up at the big clock atop the Spurgeon Building and decided to trot the three and a half blocks he still had to go. In his mind was a picture of Captain Bristoe standing at the door of the station with his pocket watch in hand.

It wasn't until after Ketchem had signed in that Captain Bris-

toe came out of his office and barked at him. His pudgy face resembled that of an English bulldog eyeing an unwelcome intruder.

"So, Ketchem, you finally showed up. Maybe you should've kept your room at the Y. It's closer to the station, and there're no pretty girls there to keep you from getting to work on time."

"Sorry, captain. It won't happen again."

"That's what you said the last four times. The chief's getting old, and I think he made one of his numerous mistakes in hiring you. He's still top dog, and I have to accept his decisions. But mark my words, Ketchem, you'd better shape up soon if you hope to remain on the force."

"Yes, sir."

"You've been at Mary Murphy's for nearly a month. She has some pretty strict rules. I know. Mike Murphy is my best friend, but I never visit him at his house any more. Really isn't his house at all. Mrs. Murphy inherited it from her parents. He doesn't even have a key. I don't know how he puts up with that shrew. All those rules. No smoking, no drinking, no loud talking, be on time for meals. Happy?"

"Well, captain, you know I don't drink or smoke and I'm pretty soft-spoken. The only one



I have trouble with is showing up for meals on time. If you could be a little more flexible with my schedule . . .”

“You’re the new man on the force, Ketchem. You can’t expect special favors. Remember, you’re a cop now. You’re on duty even when you’re not on duty. Now quit bellyaching and get out and patrol your beat.”

Ketchem walked the half block to Main Street, then north to Fourth. At this hour of the morning there were few pedestrians on the street. It gave him time as he strolled his beat to contemplate a disturbing conversation he had overheard last night. Captain Bristoe had assigned him extra night patrol; therefore it wasn’t until nearly midnight that he got off duty. Since he was a policeman and of necessity had to come in at various hours of the night, Mrs. Murphy had done the unthinkable. She’d entrusted him with a key to the front door, which was locked promptly at ten thirty every night except Saturday, when it was secured at midnight. Anyone else wishing to enter after that hour had to ring the bell and risk Mrs. Murphy’s wrath.

When Ketchem entered, the only illumination was from a single small light bulb in the vestibule. Having missed his evening meal, he made his way cautiously towards the kitchen

to see what she had left in the icebox to satisfy his gnawing hunger. He stopped abruptly when he saw light seeping from under the kitchen door and heard Mrs. Murphy’s voice. The tone was far from pleasant.

“It’s no use, Maureen. You can beg till you’re blue in the face, but that girl has got to go.”

“Why? Why have you suddenly turned against her?”

“She doesn’t pay any rent for one thing. She wears your clothes. Clothes I pay for.”

“That’s silly. I buy most of my clothes now that I’m working at Kress’s. She shares my room. It’s not a room you could rent out. And I let her wear my clothes because she doesn’t have much of her own. You know she’s taking pre-nursing classes at the junior college. You can’t expect her to go around naked.”

Ketchem heard a sharp intake of breath. “Don’t say things like that.”

“And you can’t begrudge Elaine the little she eats. She more than compensates you for that by doing practically all the housework. You were nice enough to her when I first brought her home and you agreed she could share my room. I want to know what’s caused you to change your attitude. You can’t think she’s got



her sights set on Ryan and will take him away from Sheila?"

Ketchem couldn't imagine anyone not liking Elaine Campbell. She was a lovely young lady, the same age as Maureen, nineteen, and perhaps even prettier. Maureen was a vivacious redhead loaded with self-confidence; Elaine, an ethereal and rather quiet blonde. In the time he had lived there, Ketchem had fallen in love with them both but had prudently kept this fact to himself until he could work up enough nerve to decide which one to ask out first. All the tenants and the rest of the family were enchanted by Elaine. Mr. Murphy looked upon her as a second daughter, and Ryan treated her like a sister. It was beyond Ketchem's comprehension that Mrs. Murphy could be thinking of making her leave. He wondered what had brought about his landlady's apparent change of heart.

"She acts so superior. Just because she had a rich father and grew up in the lap of luxury, she's got her nose in the air. You saw how she reacted when she saw our silverware. She positively shivered. So what if they're just plate and not sterling and some knives and spoons and have stains that simply won't come out? Heaven knows we've got to use what we have. I can't afford to buy new ones just

because of a few stains. The other boarders understand and never complain. They realize we're in a depression and have to make do with what we have till things get better. She's got nothing to be snooty about. She always makes sure she uses unblemished ones."

"Mom, she's really not uppity. Her parents were overprotective, and she's withdrawn and unsure of herself because she's had a rough time since they died and she hasn't been able to get a job. But when she finishes classes in June, she'll be able to continue her nursing studies at County Hospital and will get paid. She needs looking after until she can build up her confidence. I'm warning you. If you throw her out, I'll leave with her."

Mrs. Murphy's gasp was almost a screech. "Maureen, you can't mean that! That girl has cast a spell over everyone in this house." Neither woman spoke for nearly a minute. Ketchem could picture them glaring defiantly at each other.

Finally Mrs. Murphy emitted a long sigh of resignation. "All right, all right. If you're that determined, she can stay. Now put this supper plate for Mr. Ketchem in the icebox. He'll be mighty hungry after working so late at night. He's a nice young man, Maureen. A hard worker.



It wouldn't surprise me if one day he's promoted to chief of police. I think he really likes you. Why don't you pay more attention to him and less to Mr. Dunlap?"

"Forrest knows how to charm a girl. Ken Ketchem is much too reserved. If he wants to get anywhere with me, he's got to show some gumption."

The icebox door opened and closed, and Ketchem heard their footsteps approach the kitchen door. Not wanting to be caught eavesdropping, he ducked behind the dining room table. "Time you were in bed, Maureen. Don't forget to turn out the light."

Ketchem waited a full five minutes after they had emerged from the kitchen and gone to their rooms before investigating the icebox to see what Mrs. Murphy had prepared for him. He was pleased to find that it was a chopped egg sandwich, a fried chicken breast, and some cucumber slices. Clearly he was Mrs. Murphy's fairhaired boy. He wondered why. If any other tenant missed meals, he went hungry. Being Irish, maybe she thought highly of policemen. He poured himself a glass of milk and sat down at the kitchen table. While he ate, he contemplated the disturbing conversation he had overheard. He also hoped Maureen would take her

mother's advice about paying less attention to Forrest Dunlap and more to him. He looked down at his feet and promised himself to trim the grass that was growing under them.

Maureen's brother Ryan, who was two years older than she, worked as a printer's helper for the local newspaper. Ketchem turned right on Sycamore and walked to Third Street, where the plant was located. He was on friendly terms with Ryan and thought he might be able to shed some light on his mother's hostile attitude towards Elaine.

The *Register* was an afternoon newspaper, but the huge rotary press was roaring when Ketchem arrived. By signs he managed to convey to the foreman that he needed to speak to Ryan. The foreman nodded toward the door. Outside in the relative quiet, Ryan laughed. "I hope Mr. Patrick didn't get the impression you were going to arrest me. What can I do for you?" He leaned back against the brick wall of the building, removed a cigarette from the package in his shirt pocket, and lighted it with a match from a folder. He extended the pack to Ketchem, who shook his head. The young policeman was amazed that Ryan smoked, since his mother frequently denounced "that deadly weed." She didn't keep it a secret that



she held cigarettes responsible for her father's death and also that of her mother, who had had to breathe "that foul smoke all the time."

Ketchem recounted the conversation he had overheard Friday night. Ryan expressed no surprise but was unable to account for his mother's animosity towards Elaine.

"That girl's an angel. She's no flirt and barely speaks to the male boarders. You know that. Her behavior has been beyond reproach since she's lived at our house. But I've noticed that Mom's been rather cool to her the past week. I haven't figured out why. Elaine knows I'm engaged to Sheila Wagner. She has no designs on me, and I have none on her."

"Would you mind telling me how Elaine came to move in with your sister?"

"You know Maureen works behind the candy counter at Kress's five and dime. About four months ago, Elaine came into the store looking for work. There were no openings. When she came out of the manager's office, she looked so lost that Maureen couldn't help but feel sorry for her. She offered Elaine a chocolate and got her talking. Maureen's good at that. Anyway, Maureen persuaded her to come home with her. She's been there ever since."

Ketchem wanted details. "What did she tell Maureen?"

"Her father had been a wealthy businessman somewhere back in the Midwest. Illinois, I think. He lost practically everything in the crash. They moved to California three years ago, and her father got a job as manager of an apartment building. Her parents were in Long Beach last year when the earthquake struck and they were killed."

"Over a hundred people died in that quake."

"Most in the Long Beach area. Only a couple in Orange County, although we got a terrible shaking. Anyway, Elaine's parents had very little money saved, and most of it had to be used for their burial. The owner of the apartments let her stay rent-free for six months, then she had to move to an inexpensive rooming house. Her money had just about run out when she met Maureen."

"Doesn't she have any relatives?"

"Just a couple of distant cousins back East. Anyway, when Maureen brought her home, Mom seemed delighted to get someone who was willing to help with the housework for room and board. Maureen and I help out as much as we can, but we both have jobs. Dad is handicapped and can't do much. But



Mom's whole attitude has changed towards Elaine, me, and even Dad. Only one she seems to treat well nowadays is you. I understand she's trusted you with a key to the house. That's something none of the rest of us have."

"I can understand her not handing out keys to all the boarders, but I'd expect all the family members to have them."

"Mom says we don't need keys. We all have our curfews, and she's always there. Says we might lose them and then burglars could get into the house. But I know she just wants to keep us under control."

"What about your dad? You mean he doesn't have a key to his own house?"

"It's not his house." Ketchem remembered that Captain Bristoe had told him the same thing. "Grandpa left it to Mom when he passed away ten years ago. Maureen's due to get it when Mom's time comes. When he built it, Grandpa was planning to have a dozen children, so he included lots of bedrooms. Good thing, too. He and Grandma had only one child. Mom turned it into a boardinghouse 'cause we didn't need all the rooms but we sure needed the money. Even though Dad's a disabled veteran, he gets only a pittance of a pension."

"He looks pretty healthy to me."

"He was gassed in France and has lung problems and heart trouble. He can't do any strenuous work even though he looks fit. He does have a job as a representative for Interstate Press, a big L.A. printing company, but he doesn't make many sales. It gives him an excuse to get out and visit friends during the day. Mom is rather domineering, you know."

That was a fact that Ketchem had not failed to notice.

Ryan flipped his half-smoked cigarette into the gutter. "Well, I better get back inside before Mr. Patrick has a hemorrhage. We still got a paper to get out."

"Does your mother know you smoke?"

"She'd kill me if she knew. And also Forrest Dunlap. He's a great guy. Works at Lawrence's Tobacco Shop down the street. Slips me a pack now and then. I keep them here at the plant. He also gives Dad a cigar every week to smoke when he goes fishing at Newport Beach on Fridays with your Captain Bristoe. He always catches enough for Mom to use in her chowder. She says it's about the only contribution he makes to the household."

"It seems to me your parents get along fine."

"Don't let appearances de-



ceive you. She's got him completely under her thumb. Me too, to tell the truth. Maureen's the only one who shows any spunk. Anyway, keep this conversation confidential. I don't want to get anyone in trouble. Especially Dad."

Ketchem had sized up Dunlap as a pretty smooth character who felt completely at ease in the company of the opposite sex and wanted to make as many conquests as possible. The fact that Dunlap worked at a shop that sold tobacco didn't bother Mrs. Murphy as long as he paid his rent and obeyed all her rules while under her roof. The young policeman was thinking that if Mrs. Murphy became aware of Forrest Dunlap's duplicity, she might send him packing, thus enhancing Ketchem's chances with Maureen. But of course it wouldn't be ethical to inform on a rival.

On Friday, much to his delight, Ken learned that he was going to be able to sit at the dining room table that night along with the entire Murphy family and all the other boarders. Because of Captain Bristoe's scheduling, Ketchem had had to miss evening meals for over two weeks. Mrs. Murphy had been very nice about it and left food in the icebox for him to eat when he came in at midnight. That morning Bristoe informed him

that one of the ill officers he had been substituting for was back on roster and that Ketchem would not be required to do double duty unless another man called in sick.

Meals at the Murphy table were normally served family-style, the dishes circulated clockwise around the table. When soup or chowder was on the menu, however, the routine varied. Elaine placed the tureen on the table directly in front of Mrs. Murphy, who ladled the food into bowls and handed them to Ryan on her left and Elaine on her right, and these two passed them along their respective sides of the table. Sometimes Mrs. Murphy would serve herself first, and sometimes she waited until she saw that Mr. Murphy, at the opposite end of the table, had received his before taking hers. There was speculation among the boarders that if she served herself first she was irritated with her husband.

The punctilious Mrs. Murphy had set seven P.M. as dinner-time. For a half hour or so before seven, most of the inhabitants sat in the parlor listening to the radio and discussing the events of the day. When Ketchem went into the room, he plopped down in an easy chair next to Mrs. Watson, a widow and RN working for a doctor whose office was



in his house directly across the street. She had resided at the boardinghouse longer than any other roomer. Immediately after moving in, Ketchem had learned she was reputed to know everything about everybody and was Mrs. Murphy's confidant.

Mrs. Watson lowered the newspaper she was reading and exclaimed, "Well, Ken, fancy seeing *you* at dinnertime. This is a rare treat. That nasty old Charlie Bristoe's been keeping you busy all the time. I'll bet he never misses *his* dinner." She was an advocate of social equality and believed in calling everyone by his first name.

"You can say that again. He goes home at six, regular as clockwork. And you're right, he has been overworking me, but I'm off tonight and all day tomorrow. Unless, of course, an emergency occurs. Anyway, I'm looking forward to a good fish dinner tonight."

"Prepare yourself for disappointment. Mike didn't catch enough. It's going to be chowder as usual."

"Well, they tell me Mrs. Murphy makes a dandy fish chowder."

"They aren't deceiving you. It's always delicious. I've lived here forever, it seems, and I can remember only a half dozen Fridays when we had a full fish dinner. I don't believe Mike is a

very good fisherman. He usually manages to catch only a few small ones. But he's never failed to get enough for chowder. By the way, you're in for a pleasant surprise tonight. Mary has changed the seating. She switched you with Forrest, so you'll be sitting next to Maureen. You'll like that, won't you?"

Ketchem's face reddened. "Well, it'll certainly beat looking at Mr. North on the other side of the table." He nodded to Forrest Dunlap, who came into the room and sat down on the couch next to Mr. Murphy. "You know, I envy Dunlap. He has so much self-assurance. I wish I had half as much."

"Oh, don't belittle yourself, Ken. I've had occasion to observe you on patrol, and I've talked about you with a lot of business people I come in contact with. They all say the same thing. Even though you're very young, you have the ability to take charge of a situation and settle it without offending anyone. You're courteous, considerate, and respectful. Above all, you are honest and trustworthy. That's why Mary allows you to have a house key. You are obviously very intelligent. You make a very fine police officer."

Ketchem, overwhelmed by the compliments, blushed again and remained silent. Mrs. Wat-

son nudged him secretly with her elbow. "You may not believe this, but Charlie thinks very highly of you. He told me so himself. Now, don't let on to him that I told you. He only harasses you because he's afraid if he praises you you might get too big for your britches, like Mr. Hotshot over there." Mrs. Watson's face betrayed her disapproval as she glanced at Dunlap. "That man has the biggest ego I've ever encountered. He thinks he's God's gift to women. I'm sure Mary would prefer . . . Oh, there's the gong. Time to eat."

Mr. Murphy turned off the radio. Everyone filed into the dining room and took his assigned seat. The food, in covered dishes, was already on the table, a large tureen in front of Mrs. Murphy's place. After everyone was seated, Mrs. Murphy spoke. "I'm very pleased that Officer Ketchem is able to dine with us tonight, something he has unfortunately not been able to do very often." She looked directly at Maureen. "Officer Ketchem is a fine young man, and we should be grateful to him for protecting us from criminal elements." She glanced down at the table, then turned to Elaine, seated at her right. "The bowls, Elaine!" she hissed, unable to keep the asperity from her voice.

"Oh!" The girl jumped up and rushed into the kitchen, return-

ing a moment later with a tray of soup bowls, which she placed next to the tureen.

Mrs. Murphy, after a grim look at her husband, put a small amount of chowder into a bowl and set it down before her. She then began filling bowls with chowder and handing them alternately to Elaine and to Ryan on her left. When everyone was served, Mrs. Murphy nodded her head, her usual sign that they were now permitted to begin eating.

Ketchem sampled the savory dish and found that it was very good. He smiled at Mrs. Murphy and touched his right hand to his lips to tell her he thought it was terrific. Mrs. Murphy dipped her spoon into her bowl and began to eat. Almost instantly she uttered a shrill screech and reached for her water glass, which fell from her hand before she could get it to her lips. She was making a rasping, gasping sound. Ketchem saw that she was clutching her throat. Pointing to Elaine, she managed to gasp, "You ch—" before she began retching. Mrs. Watson rushed to aid her, and Ketchem followed. "Help me get her to the couch in the parlor," she cried. Mr. Murphy came up behind Ketchem.

Ketchem spoke promptly. "Ryan, get Dr. Newcomb! Mau-

reen, call an ambulance! Everyone else, please remain seated."

Mr. Murphy and Ketchem got her to the couch. Leah Watson leaned over her and said, "It might be poison. Maybe we should try to get her to vomit. But that might be the worst thing to do. I don't know. Oh, Ken, she's starting to convulse. Oh, where's the doctor?"

"Ryan went to get him. He should be here soon." He glanced at the dining room doorway. Elaine was peeking in with huge, frightened eyes.

Maureen came rushing back, knelt by her mother, and took her hand. "Mom, Mom! An ambulance is on the way." She looked at her father, who was watching his wife helplessly, then at Ketchem. Her eyes asked, Why aren't you doing anything?

He answered aloud. "We can't do anything till the doctor gets here."

The parlor door opened. Ryan and Dr. Newcomb rushed to the couch. The doctor scooted Maureen out of his way and bent over Mrs. Murphy, whose convulsions had begun to slacken. He lifted her eyelids and looked into her mouth. He sniffed. After he checked her pulse, he opened his medical bag, took out a sphygmomanometer, and measured her blood pressure, then gave her an injection.

While he was proceeding with his examination, the doorbell rang. Ketchem admitted the ambulance crew. The doctor said, "Take her to my office. I can treat her more quickly there." The ambulance crew put Mrs. Murphy on a stretcher and rushed her out. Dr. Newcomb put his paraphernalia back into his bag and spoke softly to Ketchem. "Officer, please allow Nurse Watson to bring to my office the remains of whatever Mrs. Murphy was eating. She's ingested some kind of poison. I believe I know what it was, but I need to be sure. I have the necessary equipment to make the tests there. Also, you'd better get all the people out of the dining room, and don't remove anything else from the table."

Maureen, Ryan, Mr. Murphy, and Mrs. Watson accompanied the doctor to his office. Ketchem moved over to the dining room doorway and spoke softly to Elaine. She looked doubtful at first, then nodded and went into the kitchen while Ketchem explained to the three remaining boarders that they were to leave the food untouched and wait in their rooms or the parlor. Elaine would provide sandwiches and fresh coffee to those who were still hungry. He would let them know the moment the doctor reported on Mrs. Murphy's condition. Everyone decided to



sit in the parlor. All requested sandwiches and coffee.

After about forty minutes the three Murphys returned. It was clear to Ketchem from their expressions—Maureen's eyes were still red from crying—that the worst had happened. Mike Murphy stopped in the parlor doorway and in a soft voice said, "Mary died five minutes ago. The doctor believes she was poisoned and has notified the police. Until they arrive, Officer Ketchem is to be in charge, and we are to follow his instructions."

Ketchem felt all eyes on him. He had no qualms about exercising his command over the group. He now spoke with the authority of the law behind him. "Investigating officers will be arriving soon. It will expedite matters for them if you go to your rooms to await their arrival. After the dining room and kitchen have been examined, the officers will want to speak to each of you individually. Any questions?" There was some mumbling and grumbling but no questions, and they all moved slowly out of the room. Ketchem checked the dining room to make sure it was vacant; then he went into the kitchen. Elaine was standing at the sink with a glass in her hand. She turned as he entered and quickly put down the glass.

"How is Mrs. Murphy?"

"She died just a few minutes ago. The doctor said she swallowed a deadly poison."

Elaine's face turned paler than the whiteness of the room, and her slender body swayed. Ketchem took her by the shoulders and lowered her onto a chair.

"Are you all right?"

"A little lightheaded."

Ketchem glanced at the sink. "Have you washed anything that was in the dining room?"

"No. Just the things I used to make the sandwiches you asked for." She raised her tearstained face to his. "How?" she managed to ask.

"I don't know. The police investigators will have to determine that."

"But, Mr. Ketchem, you're a policeman. Can't you?"

"I'm just supposed to keep an eye on things until the others arrive. I'd like it if you called me Ken, Elaine."

"Poor Mrs. Murphy. What a horrible way to die. I want to see Maureen if I may. She must be devastated." Ketchem nodded. She rose unsteadily. He took hold of her left forearm and put his right arm around her waist, holding her firmly as he guided her up the stairs. He left her at the door to her and Maureen's room, then quickly descended.

Captain Bristoe came in just as Ketchem reached the bottom



step. They went into the dining room. Bristoe sat down at Mrs. Murphy's place and abruptly stood up. "Damn!" he cursed, reaching down and bringing up a spoon. "Fish chowder! That's going to leave a hell of a stain on the seat of my pants."

Ketchem, who was sitting in Mr. Murphy's chair at the far end of the table, tried and failed to suppress a chuckle. "Mrs. Murphy must have dropped it."

Bristoe looked with distaste at the bowls of chowder, which still remained on the table. He had instructed his assistants to wait until he got Ketchem's oral report before removing the food and beverages that were served at dinner. He moved the soup tureen aside so he could more easily see the young patrolman. He appeared none too pleased with what he saw.

"Okay, Ketchem, you were on the spot when it happened. First tell me where everyone was sitting at this table, and give a brief description of each. I'll interview them individually after you tell me what took place here." He reached into a coat pocket and brought out a three by five notebook and a fountain pen.

"Going to take notes?"

"Of course I'm taking notes, you numbskull! What the hell do you think I'm going to do with this notebook and pen?

Cook an omelette? Get on with it!"

The rookie shifted uneasily in his chair. "Mrs. Murphy was sitting where you are. To your right along the side of the table was Elaine Campbell, nineteen, a friend of Mrs. Murphy's daughter Maureen. She's studying nursing at the junior college. Sitting next to her was Mrs. Leah Watson, whom you know."

Bristoe nodded. "Forty-five. Nurse for Dr. Newcomb."

"Russell Knight, who works for Blandings Nursery on Main Street, sat next to her. He's about forty. Big eater. Next to him was Forrest Dunlap. Flirts with Maureen. Tries to with Elaine, but she's not having any. He works at Lawrence's Tobacco Shop and slips cigarettes to Ryan and cigars to Mr. Murphy, who was sitting in the chair I'm occupying now." He paused to give Bristoe, who was busy scribbling, a chance to comment. The captain merely grunted.

"To your left along the other side of the table were Ryan and Maureen. I sat next to Maureen. That wasn't my usual place. Mrs. Murphy had changed me to Dunlap's former seat. I don't think he liked that, but I did. Walter North sat next to me. He's a bit over fifty and works at

the sugar beet factory on Delhi Road."

Bristoe wrote for a few more seconds. "Okay, now let's have a succinct account of what happened."

"After we were all seated, Mrs. Murphy put a small amount of chowder into a bowl for herself. Then she filled bowls and handed them alternately to Elaine and Ryan, who passed them along the table until everyone was served. Everyone except Mrs. Murphy dug right in. She was looking at me to see if I liked the chowder. I had missed it every other Friday night, you know, because you had me working overtime. I ate a big spoonful and indicated with a gesture that it was terrific. She smiled and then began eating her own. I don't think she had eaten more than a spoonful when she screeched horribly. She clutched at her throat and reached out for her glass of water. Mrs. Watson and I jumped up to help. Mr. Murphy and I carried his wife to the couch in the living room. Ryan ran to get the doctor. Maureen called for an ambulance. When Dr. Newcomb arrived, he told me Mrs. Murphy had probably ingested some kind of poison and had the ambulance crew take her to his office. The Murphys went with the doctor. Nurse Watson took Mrs. Murphy's chowder along so

the doctor could determine what the poison was. I had everyone wait in the parlor until the Murphys returned and told us Mrs. Murphy had died. The doctor sent word that I was to be in charge, so I sent everyone to their rooms to await your arrival."

Captain Bristoe capped his fountain pen and closed his notebook. "That's fine, Ketchem. You did all right. I think you're wise enough to recognize that we're dealing with murder. Dr. Newcomb told me Mary Murphy swallowed a lethal dose of nicotine. Neither of us believes she could have taken it accidentally, and the doc swears she wouldn't have chosen that method of taking her own life if she were suicidal, which he claims she wasn't. So you can rightly conclude that one of the people who sat at this table is the murderer. Any of them—the guy who works at the nursery, the ladies' man who sells tobacco, the two nurses, the one who works at the sugar beet factory—would be likely to know the toxic nature of nicotine and could obtain it easily enough. But if what you tell me about how the food was served is true, I can't figure out how in the hell the poison got in Mrs. Murphy's chowder and who would have a motive to put it there."

Ketchem reminded him that when a wife is killed, the hus-

band is always the number one suspect.

"For all I know anybody sitting at the table, even you, might have had a motive, but not Mike Murphy. I've been his best friend since grade school. Mary may have been a shrew, but Mike loved her. Sure he fooled around with an old flame down at Newport Beach on Fridays when we went fishing, but it was wasn't serious. He doesn't gain financially by Mary's death. He's always known Maureen inherits the house. And his wife had no insurance. Anyway, he couldn't have put the poison in her chowder even if he wanted to. He was the farthest one from her. Hell, could anybody?" He made a helpless gesture with his hands. "Did anyone get out of his chair while the chowder was being passed around?"

"No." Ketchem explained in detail how the chowder was served. "Mrs. Murphy picked up the bowls completely at random and looked at each one before putting in the chowder. If poison had been put into one of the bowls beforehand, she would have seen it. And even if she missed it, there was no way a person could predict who would get a particular bowl. She had no regular routine. Tonight, as I've already told you, she handed them alternately to the right and left sides of the table. She

usually didn't serve herself first, but tonight she did."

The puzzled police captain shook his head. "Well, the lab boys'll check what's left of the chowder in all the bowls and in the tureen. But they won't find traces of nicotine in any of them. Otherwise there'd be a lot more carcasses in the morgue. I'll have to do some stiff thinking about this. Listen, Ketchem, I'm going to question each of the residents separately. I won't need your help, so you go on up to your room and get a good night's sleep. I'm relieving you of duty tomorrow. You won't need to report in at headquarters. Take the whole morning off," Bristoe said magnanimously, "and I'll talk to you in the afternoon after I get the reports from the lab and the coroner."

"Thanks, captain." Ketchem went to his room, and it wasn't until just before he fell asleep that he remembered that the next day was his regular day off.

Ketchem was shocked to find that it was after nine thirty when he awoke in the morning. He dressed quickly and went downstairs. No one was in the parlor or the dining room. He went into the kitchen. Elaine was at the sink, washing dishes. She seemed startled to see him.

"Where is everybody?"



"Maureen, Ryan, and Mr. Murphy have gone to a funeral home to make arrangements for Mrs. Murphy's burial. Everyone else has gone to work. Captain Bristoe said it was all right." She put the plate she was washing into the drain basket. "I don't like him. He scares me. He was very suspicious. He asked me if I knew about poisons. All I know is that poison has a skull and crossbones on the label. We haven't talked about poisons in any of my classes yet. He thinks one of us murdered Mrs. Murphy, but he has to be wrong. Who would want to kill Mrs. Murphy?"

"That's the question. She died of nicotine poisoning. The captain doesn't see how it could have happened accidentally. Neither do I."

"Would you like some breakfast? I made scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast for the others."

"If it's not too much trouble."

While she was preparing his food, he decided it might be a good idea to ask a few questions. He had done more talking to her in the last twenty-four hours than in the whole preceding month. He found it easier to talk to her than he had imagined, and he liked the sound of her voice. "Did Mrs. Murphy do anything different in the kitchen yesterday?"

"No. She liked to do all the

cooking herself. Maureen and I helped with the food preparation. Peeling potatoes, washing vegetables, and so forth. I usually set the table and did all the cleanup work. But yesterday she knew that Maureen wouldn't be home at her usual time and I would be late because I had a conference with my school counselor. So she said I didn't have to set the table. She would do it herself in the afternoon. It was very thoughtful of her."

Elaine put the eggs and bacon on a plate and set it on the kitchen table. Ketchem dug in and found the food cooked to perfection. Elaine poured him a large glass of milk. He thanked her, and she smiled as she watched him empty the plate. He drained the glass of milk and looked up at her.

"That hit the spot, Elaine. If you don't watch out you're going to be as good a cook as Mrs. Murphy was. Now don't mind Captain Bristoe. He gets paid to be suspicious. That's his job."

Captain Bristoe showed up at three thirty and ordered Ketchem to sit in the chair that Elaine had occupied the night before. "Well, my fine young patrolman, the coroner confirmed Doc Newcomb's diagnosis. No nicotine was found anywhere except in Mrs. Murphy's bowl and on the spoon that soiled the seat of my pants. Here's the good



news. After some sagacious questioning of all the residents, I have discovered someone with a credible motive to do in Mrs. Murphy." A dark look passed over his pudgy face. "And I also came up with the fact that you were a bit *too* succinct when you described what took place at last night's dinner. I hope it was just an oversight. You failed to mention a significant fact that everyone else remembered quite clearly. That fact tells me who put the poison in Mrs. Murphy's chowder. The little blonde beauty."

Ketchem protested. "There's no way she could have done it, and she had no motive."

"Oh, motive she had all right. And opportunity. When I questioned everyone individually last night, I learned that Mrs. Murphy had planned to evict Elaine Campbell because she believed Mr. Murphy was paying too much attention to the young lady and vice versa. I managed to pry that out of Leah Watson. That woman is a fountain of information. The girl obviously found out Mrs. Murphy's intentions and killed her. You neglected to tell me what everyone else clearly saw and heard! Just before Mrs. Murphy collapsed, she named her killer. She pointed to Miss Campbell and said 'You!'"

"Captain, you can't believe

"*Don't interrupt, Ketchem!* I'm about to demonstrate how Miss Campbell managed to put the poison into Mrs. Murphy's chowder without anyone seeing her do it. Go to the kitchen, bring in a load of soup bowls, and put them in the same place they were last night."

Ketchem did as he was told.

"Now I'll reenact the crime. Okay, you're Miss Campbell. Take this." He gave Ketchem a small vial filled with a brownish fluid. "We'll pretend this water in the tureen is chowder. Now, I'm Mrs. Murphy. You tell if I do this like she did." He put a small amount of "chowder" in one bowl and set it in front of him.

"So far, so good."

"Okay. Now drop your hands below the edge of the table and slip the cover off the vial. Keep the vial in your hand."

Ketchem complied. Bristoe took another bowl and filled it. "Okay, now as you take this bowl pour the contents of the vial in my bowl."

"But, captain . . ."

"No buts, Ketchem. *Do it!*"

"Okay, hand me the bowl."

Bristoe extended a bowl to Ketchem, who had to rotate his wrist in order to empty the vial. The contents of the vial and the contents of bowl spilled onto the table.

"Damn it, Ketchem, can't you do anything right?"



"I tried to tell you, captain. Mrs. Murphy was handing the bowls across the corner of the table to Elaine. The bowls she took from Mrs. Murphy would never have been directly over Mrs. Murphy's bowl. It wasn't possible for her to drop anything into it, especially liquid nicotine. Even a prestidigitator couldn't have done it. Nice try, though."

"Cut the sarcasm." His brow furrowed. "But I'm not so dense I can't see you're right." He looked at the water spreading over the table and dripping onto the edge of his chair. "Well, at least this chowder won't stain my pants like that soup spoon I sat on last night. Mrs. Bristoe gave me holy hell when she saw it."

Some of the captain's words started a chain reaction in Ketchem's brain: soup spoon, stain. In a moment all became clear.

"Congratulations, captain. You've just solved our riddle. As paradoxical as it sounds, Mrs. Murphy murdered herself."

Bristoe was staring at Ketchem as if the rookie officer were a candidate for the loony bin. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I believe there's only one possible way the nicotine could have got into that chowder. From my own observation I know that some of Mrs. Murphy's soup spoons and other

utensils have permanent stains. From a conversation I overheard between Maureen and her mother, I learned that Mrs. Murphy was reluctant to dispose of the utensils and buy new ones because they are still usable and no one except Elaine minded using them. Elaine always made sure she had utensils that were in good condition. I knew Mrs. Murphy was anxious to have Elaine out of her house, but I couldn't understand why. You uncovered the reason during your investigation. She thought Elaine was trying to steal her husband. A preposterous supposition, but Mrs. Murphy believed it. In order to keep her daughter from leaving if she threw Elaine out, she had promised Maureen that Elaine could stay. Since she couldn't stand letting Elaine stay, she came up with a method to get rid of her permanently. Mrs. Murphy knew all about the deadly ingredient in tobacco and how to extract it. She coated the bottom of a spoon with a lethal dose of liquid nicotine and let it dry. When she set the table, she put that spoon at Elaine's place. Lying there it looked like a perfectly clean spoon. But I'm sure Elaine did a quick check of her table setting just before dinner was served. She turned her spoon over and, seeing what she

thought was a stain, switched it with Mrs. Murphy's. There was no harm in that. Mrs. Murphy always maintained that the stained silverware was perfectly usable. When Mrs. Murphy put the spoon into her bowl of hot chowder, the dried nicotine softened and contaminated the small amount she ate. When she pointed at Elaine, she was trying to say, 'You changed spoons!' In attempting to poison Elaine she inadvertently poisoned herself. I'm extremely sorry for the grief the Murphys must suffer, but I'm very grateful that Elaine didn't use that spoon."

Captain Bristoe slumped back in his chair and regarded the young patrolman with awe. He sat in silence for several minutes, the changing expressions on his face indicating that conflicting thoughts were at odds in his brain. "What a diabolical plan! If she had succeeded, how in the world did she think she would get away with it? She'd have been the first suspect on my list, since she was the one who made and served the chowder."

Ketchem had a simple reply. "She was blinded by hate and, like most murderers who think they're too clever to be caught, failed to consider the consequences of her action."

Bristoe shook his head, then

stood up. He smiled. Ketchem thought the captain's expression resembled that of an English bulldog who had just polished off a huge juicy steak. "I'm convinced your solution's the correct one, Ketchem. It presented me with a dilemma when I first heard it. But I've got everything sorted out now. No one intentionally put poison in Mrs. Murphy's chowder. It was done inadvertently. Now an inadvertent act is, by its very nature, an accident. Mrs. Murphy's death was definitely an accident and that's how it will be written up. A very satisfactory conclusion for all concerned. The chief is going to be tickled silly that I've cleared up this case so quickly. Take the rest of the day off, my boy. Tomorrow, too. Go for a nice moonlight stroll with the little blonde doll and maybe the redhead, too. Take them to a movie. Not at the same time, of course. They both should be very grateful. The West Coast's showing *It Happened One Night*."

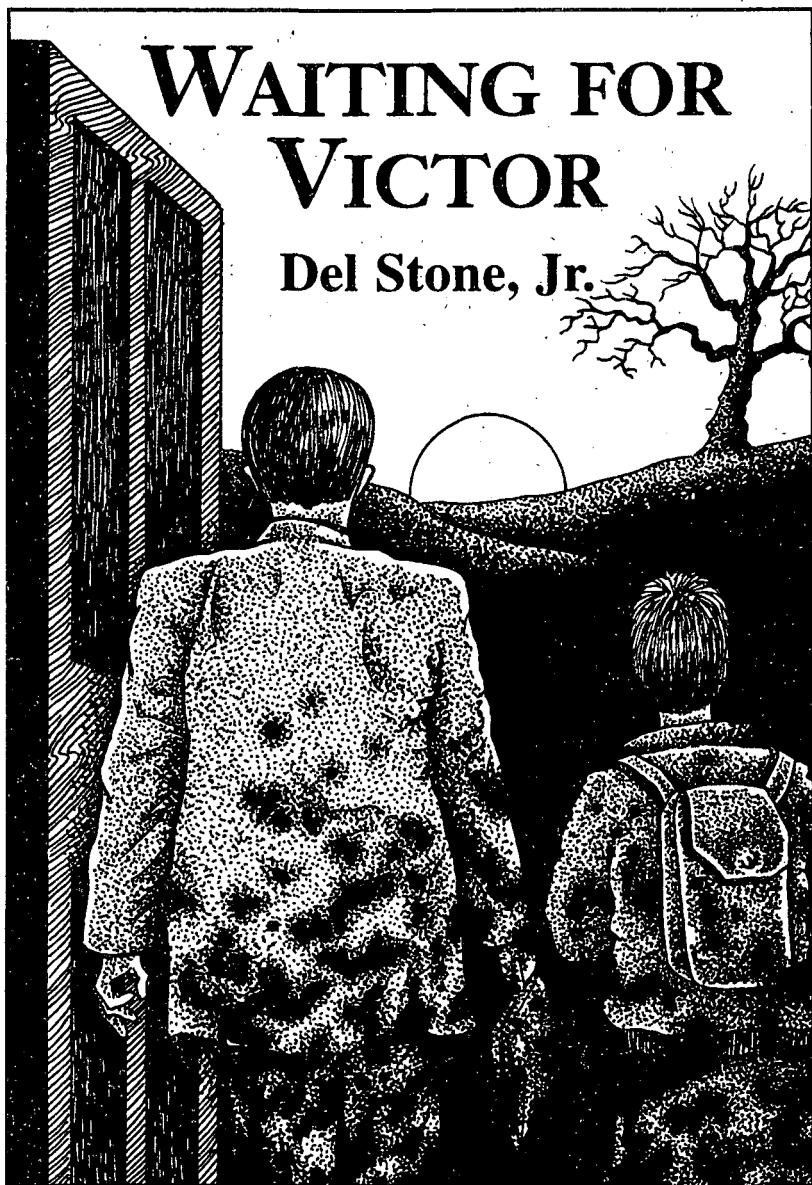
He gave his rookie a hearty clap on back. "I've always thought you had the makings of a fine policeman. Mark my words, Ketchem, you're going to make great progress professionally and romantically."

Captain Charles Bristoe never made a more accurate prediction. □

FICTION

WAITING FOR VICTOR

Del Stone, Jr.



When Betty walks into the kitchen, she doesn't recognize the man sitting at the dining room table.

Her heart sinks a little. Again this man isn't Victor. But there is always tomorrow.

"It's about time you got out of bed, Marjorie," the man says into his newspaper. "I thought you were going to sleep all morning."

Marjorie, Betty thinks. He's not Victor, and he's married to a woman named Marjorie. I wish he'd awaken and go back to his Marjorie. I wish Victor would come back to me.

She crosses the kitchen to the coffeemaker, determined to immerse herself in the daily rituals that put distance between her thoughts and Victor. A pot of coffee sits steaming on the hotpad. At least she could depend on the coffeemaker. She pencils in a note on her shopping list: COFFEE & FILTERS. She's to stop by Kroger's this afternoon to pick up a few things, coffee and filters now among them. Or did she do that yesterday? It doesn't matter. She'll go again this afternoon, because if Victor appears in the house tomorrow, he'll want his coffee. She wonders if she still has that Maxwell House coupon. Victor preferred Maxwell House, didn't he? Later, when things settled down around the house, she'd look for the coupon.

The man gives the newspaper a brusque shake. He says, "Could you start my breakfast? I'm in a rush."

Betty steals a glance at him. He's a CPA, she guesses, or a lawyer. Maybe a banker. It's the suit; the tie; the slick, neat hair. A white-collar professional who commutes to work on the trains, a *Wall Street Journal* tucked beneath his arm, a leather briefcase in hand. His kind have appeared in the house before. He'll be leaving soon, she tells herself, perhaps never to appear again, and for that she breathes a sigh of relief. He won't be like the man who was in the house yesterday, the man who was so unlike Victor, his grotesque beer belly and lank, greasy hair the sickening antithesis to Victor's smooth, lean frame and his thatch of tight curls. The grotesque man thought Betty was somebody named Roxy, and he would not leave; he practically raped her on the kitchen floor, his advances as unlovely as the Peterbilt he claimed to drive for a living.

No. Not at all like Victor. She had fallen in love with Victor as easily as she breathed, and it was no girlish infatuation that had come over her. Rather, it had been a delirious, free-floating love that allowed her to smile for no reason, that gave her a warmth and a sense of peacefulness that smoothed the rough edges from her thoughts.

Three days. And then Victor had left the house.

Now all she could do was wait.

The man peeks from behind his newspaper. "Marjorie? Breakfast? I'm going to be late."

Betty blinks, her memories vanishing like mist in the early sun. She wishes the man would awaken and leave. She wishes Victor would sleep and be here. But she says, "What would you like?"

The man rolls his eyes. "After seventeen years I'd think you could remember. A three minute egg, a slice of toast—no butter—and a glass of orange juice. You think you could write that down somewhere?"

Indeed, she reaches for her Kroger's list and makes a note: ORANGE JUICE & EGGS.

The man disappears behind his newspaper. After a moment he says, "The market's down again for the week. That's what they get for electing a damn Democrat. Frightened women, those traders. That's what they are."

Betty sets a saucepan of water on the stove to boil. She frowns. She's supposed to remember something, something more important than the frightened women of the stock market, but she can't and it troubles her. If the man would awaken and leave, it might come back to her.

"Detroit's raising the price of new cars an average of three hundred dollars," the man observes. "Greedy bastards. They earn record profits the last quarter and now they're jacking up prices. No wonder everybody's buying Japanese."

An image forms in Betty's mind: Victor, kneeling by her car in the carport, pointing to the wheels and saying, "Chrome rims. A set of chrome rims would really dress up this buggy." He looks so beautiful, Betty remembers thinking. This is the way life was meant to be and let it never end, let him stay in the house forever. The sight of him kneeling there fills her with such happiness that she forgets the danger until his image begins to lose substance, the light of day eating holes through his flesh, and so she screams and he hurries back inside the house to hold her and she makes him promise he won't go back outside. Solid again. He's solid. So long as he's in the house.

That's what she had to remember. She's supposed to take the car to the mechanic and have chrome rims put on, installed, whatever one does with chrome rims. Or did she do that yesterday? It doesn't matter. She'll take it in again, once she gets rid of this man and

stops by Kroger's. And if Victor should return tomorrow, she'll show him the chrome rims. He'll be pleased.

The water is boiling. She drops in an egg and sets the timer for three minutes. She inserts a slice of bread in the toaster. She pours the last of the orange juice and sets the glass on the table. The man grunts. She wishes he would wake up and leave.

"Damned Palestinians are rioting again. . . ."

Victor was of Lebanese extraction, Betty remembers, and then she stops herself, anger flaring inside. Damn this man! Why does everything he says remind her of Victor?

The timer dings. Victor was tall for Lebanese. Taller than those Lebanese people she's seen on the evening news, the ones being shot and blown up by bombs. Toast jumps up in the toaster slot. Victor was broad of shoulder and full of mirth. Somewhere in the house, a toilet flushes.

Victor smoked Marlboros, Betty remembers. She makes a note on her Kroger's list: MARLBOROS. Or did she buy a carton yesterday? It doesn't matter.

"Did you hear that?" the man asks.

Victor used a Zippo lighter, and Betty smiles as she reaches into the cabinet for napkins, finding them under the cartons of Marlboros, and recalls the way he would sit on the living room couch snapping that lighter shut and expertly rolling the cigarette with his lips to the corner of his mouth so he could talk and smoke at the same time.

"That was the toilet, wasn't it?" the man says, his voice an octave higher.

Victor looked like a fighter pilot. He would have flown Mustangs in World War II if he'd been alive then. She would have ordered him a bomber jacket from the Banana Republic catalogue if he'd stayed—

"Somebody is in the house," the man whispers urgently.

Maybe Victor will come back tomorrow, Betty tells herself as she tongs the egg into a cup. Maybe when she awakens tomorrow morning it will be Victor sitting at the dining room table, a cup of Maxwell House propping up the newspaper, a Marlboro fuming in the ashtray, and not just another unhappy stranger, like this—

"Marjorie!" the man hisses. He scrabbles out of the chair and seizes her arm. His eyes are wide as full moons. "*Somebody is in the house!*" He emphasizes each syllable, as if it were important that

she understand him without question. "Somebody is in the god-damned house with us!"

She balls her hands into fists and jerks away from him angrily. "Of course there's somebody in the house!" she shouts. "There's always somebody in the house! And it's never—"

Her grief draws back momentarily, like the trough of a wave, and her heart swells with hope. "Victor?"

From the hallway: "Mom? Can you give me a ride to the bus stop? I'm gonna miss the bus."

And then it is back, her sorrow, the sense of loss, redoubled by the effort that had pushed it away. A boy ambles into the kitchen and stops. He's ten, maybe twelve. A book sack is slung over his shoulder; a look of astonishment forms on his face. He's not Victor either. "Who's this guy, Mom?" he asks.

"Where did this kid come from?" the man blurts. "Why is he calling you Mom?"

Betty feels a tear glide down her cheek. A familiar ache rises within her, one she has felt since the day Victor left the house, and she sends her thoughts sailing across the planet as if he might somehow hear her plea: Go to sleep, Victor. Please. Go to sleep. And dream . . . of the house where every dreamer goes when he dreams of a house that seems like his own, but when he awakens and remembers his dream, he realizes he never lived there. Dream of that house, Victor, because that is where I live. And I will be there, waiting for you.

Always.

The two are firing questions at her. She holds up her hands as if to separate a pair of prizefighters. They stop. Before she can stop herself, she blurts: "I want you to get out of my house. Victor—" she nearly chokes on the name "—Victor won't be coming today, and I just want you to leave, to get out and leave me alone."

The man utters blustering protests, but he stands and buttons his jacket. The boy backs away to the carport door. As the man passes Betty, he snarls, "You're acting very strangely, Marjorie. You've got some explaining to do." Then, "I'll have my breakfast in town." Betty blinks away tears. She won't be seeing them again. Probably.

She follows them to the door. As they step outside, they seem to diminish as if the air were stealing their forms molecule by molecule. They are going back, she thinks, to wherever it is they live, to awaken in their own houses with their three minute eggs and missed buses and Marjories and Moms. And maybe they'll wonder

about the dream they had, about the strange boy or the strange man, the house and the woman who seemed so familiar but really weren't, now that they think about it. . . .

She's glad she didn't see Victor go. Three days he was in the house. Three days. And the thought arises, unbidden: Nobody dreams for three days. Not unless they're hurt, or they're sick, or they're—

Her mind jerks away from the idea. Victor will be back tomorrow. She knows he'll be back tomorrow, or maybe the next day, or surely the day after. Someday.

The man and the boy are walking away from the house. As the morning light unravels their images, Betty calls out to them, "If you see Victor, tell him—"

But they are gone before she can finish, dissolving into little span-
gles of light, like sunshine glinting off the chrome rims on her car.

So she goes back inside. To wait.

Important Notice to Subscribers: For change of address, please advise six to eight weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address to P.O. Box 54625, Boulder, CO 80328-4625.

All other mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 54625, Boulder, CO 80322-4625. (Please note different zip code).

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Henri Silberman, N.Y.C.

Tecs in the tulips? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, 1270 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020. Please label your entry "June Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit. If possible, please also include your Social Security number.

The winning entry for the January Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 157.

FICTION

DOGWATCH

Bill Crenshaw



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine 6/97

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Detective Sergeant Dolson Rigg knew right away that something was wrong. Lieutenant Casini had a new case folder and a big smile and was headed his way. Rigg pretended not to notice. It didn't work. The folder plopped down in front of him.

"I need you out front on this one," Casini said, standing next to Rigg's chair and leaning back against the desk.

Rigg was afraid to look. It would be one of two things—a puzzle or politics.

A puzzle would be some nameless dealer down in an alley with no witnesses and no evidence, the kind of homicide that would stay open forever and that Casini could use whenever he wanted a bone to pick—Hey, Rigg, when you gonna close the doper case?

Politics—well, the brass and the bureaucrats called Homicide if they wanted something done quietly or right, whether it was a homicide or no. Discreet inquiries and no paper trail. The doper in the alley would be preferable. Any doper, any alley.

Rigg turned the folder toward him. On the outside no name, no case number. His heart sort of emptied itself. Politics. He eased the folder open. Worse. Councilman Dorff, the junkyard dog of city politics.

"Dorff called about this one

special," said Casini, gazing over Rigg's head.

"Lieutenant," Rigg said, "I am truly sorry about the Harley. I didn't see it. Honest."

"'Councilman,' I told him, 'I got just the man.'"

Rigg let his eye drift across the page, hitting on key words—*missing . . . Alexander Patton . . . one y/o/m . . . reward . . .* A kidnapping? Casini was going to make him primary on a snatch? He'd had Casini all wrong, then. Casini wasn't out to get him after all. Casini was going to forgive and forget. It raised Rigg's hopes for humanity.

"I'll do right by this one, lieutenant, I swear."

Casini smiled down generously at him. "Get your teeth into it, Rigg. Be a bulldog. Be a bloodhound."

Rigg frowned. Casini was not given to metaphors. "I will, sir."

Casini scanned the squad room. "You'll need a partner."

Oh please, thought Rigg. Not Kunikos.

"Kunikos," shouted Casini across the room. "My office."

Oh well. Still a snatch, something with meat on it. A chance to prove himself, to restore his name, maybe even to make a name. He saw briefly the headline and the photo, page one above the fold, Alexander Patton Dorff, age one, safe in his father's arms, the silver-haired

Councilman Dorff extending a hand to Homicide Detective Dolson Rigg, smiling and . . . What was wrong with that picture?

"Rigg. You coming?"

Rigg rose to follow Casini, feeling the frown deepening between his eyes. "I didn't know Dorff had a little kid."

"He doesn't," said Casini, not bothering to turn around, but in the reflection of the glass walls of Casini's office, Rigg could see the smile spread. "He's missing his dog."

An unhappy politician could stop a career stone-cold with the wrong word in the wrong boss's ear at some formal dress lovefest, and here Rigg was, headed for Dorff's private office in Dorff's building on the Upper West Side with Kunikos the wild man.

Rigg punched the elevator button for Dorff's floor. "Just shut up, Kunikos."

Kunikos widened his eyes. "I didn't say anything."

"I don't want you messing up this case."

"Oh, then this is a big case. And here I thought we were in the doghouse."

Rigg waited until the elevator settled and dinged. "Kunikos, I mean it."

The doors rasped open.

"Got to see a man about a

dog," said Kunikos with a smile at the blonde trying to enter past them.

The blonde shot a look at Rigg as if it were his fault.

Rigg caught Kunikos's elbow at the door to Dorff's office. "You got to treat this seriously."

"Hey," said Kunikos, "absolutely. Politician loses pooch, I know we're talking serious. Doggone it." He snapped the door open before Rigg could answer. Dorff's receptionist lifted her smile to them. "Lead on," said Kunikos.

"You're here to find Councilman Dorff's dog?" said the receptionist, rising to announce them.

"That's right," said Rigg.

She paused with her hand on the door to Dorff's inner office, her voice low. "Take your time." She opened the door and announced them.

Dorff walked all the way around the desk to meet them. He shook each hand in both of his.

"Gentlemen," said Dorff.

"Councilman," said Rigg.

"Your Honor," said Kunikos. Rigg held his breath. It was no secret that Dorff was jockeying for an opening on the bench, but if he thought Kunikos was jerking his chain . . .

Dorff held Kunikos's gaze for an extra heartbeat or two. "Sit, sit, please," said Dorff waving

them into the chairs in front of his desk. Rigg started breathing again.

Dorff made the trip back around to his chair. An aide materialized at his right hand. "Bob Isaacs, Detective Kunikos and Detective—"

"Rigg," Rigg prompted, wishing he could remain anonymous.

"Of course," said Dorff. He interlaced his fingers and leaned forward. "Well. Where do we start?"

"From the beginning," suggested Kunikos, taking out his pad and pen, and after holding his gaze on Kunikos again, Dorff said that Bob Isaacs had better start, since he had been responsible for Alexander's exercise. Isaacs looked less than comfortable.

It had happened the day before, about noon. Isaacs had work to catch up on, so instead of walking Alexander himself, he had hired a dogwalker. The walker had returned an hour later without Alexander. "They were by the narrow part of the lake, and the leash just broke," said Isaacs. "At least that's what he said. And then Alexander was across the footbridge and into the Ramble, and the walker's other dogs were barking and getting their leashes tangled, and by the time he got over there, Alexander was just gone."

Dorff's eyes had not left the

detectives. "Well? You're professionals. How does that strike you?"

Rigg didn't know what to say but knew he needed to say something quickly or Kunikos would jump in. "Do you have a name on this dogwalker?"

Isaacs shook his head.

"A phone number?"

"I got the number from a tear-off tab from one of those hand-made flyers they tape to lamp-posts. I must have thrown it away."

Rigg hesitated a breath too long.

"Was he a good dog, Your Honor?" asked Kunikos.

Dorff swallowed and looked toward the doggie bed beside his desk, a wicker basket holding a large pillowlike affair in imitation Highland plaid and filled with cedar shavings for woodsy atmosphere and sound sleepage. "He was a great dog. Wasn't he, Bob?"

"A great dog."

Rigg cleared his throat, but Kunikos rolled on. "Your Honor," he said, his voice measured and solemn, "did Alexander have any enemies?"

Oh god, thought Rigg.

Dorff slapped his palm on the desktop and looked at Isaacs. "I told you," he said. "Bob here thinks I'm nuts, don't you, Bob? I told him there was something going on, but no, he said, just an

accident. Well, I said, let's get the professionals, didn't I, Bob?"

"Yes, sir, you sure did."

"You mean to say," said Rigg, his chair suddenly soft and pulling him in, "that Alexander did have enemies?"

Dorff gave him the stupid cop look. He jabbed his thumb into his chest. "I have enemies. What better way to get at *me*?"

Kidnap your wife, maybe? Rigg thought.

"Which," said Kunikos, tenting his fingers under his chin, "takes us back to the so-called dogwalker."

Dorff snatched an invisible gnat of truth from the air between himself and Kunikos. "Exactly. Show them the leash, Bob."

Isaacs handed Rigg a plastic freezer bag. It held a red leather leash. Rigg started to open it.

"Detective," said Dorff, his voice a warning. Rigg looked up. "Aren't you worried about fingerprints?"

Rigg hadn't even seen the motorcycle, Casini's vintage Harley sitting low between the two unmarked cars. All he had seen was an empty space, one close to the elevators for a change, and he had just popped it into reverse and whipped in and *wham*. One little slip in a dark garage after a double shift, and here he was. Dog leash. Fingerprints.

He dutifully lifted the bag to eye level.

"Notice," said Dorff, leaning back in his chair, "the fraying."

The doggie end was missing, the strap worn about two-thirds through then snapped off.

"It is made to appear to be an accident as a result of wear," said Dorff, "but not only will Bob testify that the leash had no such wear, one can see that—"

"The fibers have been recently rubbed through," said Rigg, passing the bag to Kunikos. "They haven't been discolored by exposure yet."

Dorff opened his hands in acknowledgment.

"Very good, sir," said Isaacs.

"You should be a detective, Your Honor," said Kunikos, looking at him through the bag.

"I try to notice details," Dorff acknowledged. "Do you think you might get any fingerprints?"

"Oh sure," Kunikos said. "And if we can't, maybe they can pull some up in Quantico."

Kunikos was pushing, and sooner or later Dorff was going to catch on.

"Do you," said Rigg to divert Dorff's attention, "happen to have a picture of the dog?"

"Alex," said Dorff. "Puppy pictures only, unfortunately. You know how it is—lots of pictures early on, but then one thing

leads to another and you realize you haven't had the camera out in months."

"Maybe Mr. Isaacs could come down to the station and look at some mug shots," said Kunikos.

The room was silent. Rigg felt himself go pale.

"You have," asked Dorff, "dog mug shots?"

"That might be a good idea, actually," said Kunikos, narrowing his eyes as if thinking. "Pictures and pawprints on file in case of dognapping. Dental records, if any. Lots of well-off dogs in town. But I meant mug shots to I.D. this so-called dog-walker."

Dorff thought that was a wonderful idea. Bob was at their disposal. Bob would be glad to look through mug shots and check out phone numbers on lampposts and walk them through the scene of the crime.

Bob smiled something that looked practiced.

Kunikos was in high form, dragging Isaacs from lamppost to lamppost along 77th between Broadway and Central Park West, keeping up a steady stream of questions and quips and puns that kept Isaacs glancing at Rigg. Rigg remained silent and looked away, his pace slow and deliberate. This was taking time; good. Some time on

the street, some time on the report, some cringing before Casini, and maybe he'd get back to his desk and a good clean murder.

"Do you have a stool sample?" Kunikos asked, pointing to evidence at the base of a lamppost that some owner had neither curbed nor cleaned up after his dog. "We could run checks on what we find, maybe trace his movements." Absolute stone poker face. "Got another baggie?"

Isaacs looked to Rigg.

Rigg studied the lamppost and the handbills for handymen and home remedies, for prayer rugs, for twenty-four-hour plumbers and locksmiths, for the Atlas Chiropractic Group ("You'll hold up the sky"), for Lady M's Cleaning Services ("Make Your Home Spotless"), for Madame C. Cassandra ("Your future is my present"), for apartment sitters and cat feeders and dogwalkers.

That was the difference, thought Rigg. In a vertical city you fed cats, you walked dogs. He imagined all the buildings suddenly transparent, towers of dogs stacked in apartments above the street, waiting, poised every day for that one hour to hit the pavement, thick as autumn leaves, in search of a three by three square of dirt around a scrawny tree. Plastic gloves and pooper scoopers. God.

A dogwalker swept toward the 77th Street entrance to Central Park, eleven dogs from the size of shoes to that of motorcycles fanning before him, all a bit wide-eyed as they strained at their leads, looking oxygen-deprived and urgent. Rigg moved a precautionary five or six feet away from the lamppost.

"That him?" Kunikos asked Isaacs as the dogwalker was dragged past.

Isaacs shook his head.

Kunikos stood poised to chase the walker down. "You sure? We can make the collar now."

"Cut it out, Kunikos," said Rigg.

"Keeps me on a short leash," said Kunikos, dragging Isaacs to the next lamppost.

They reached the entrance to the park. None of the handbills had seemed familiar to Isaacs. He was sorry. He didn't know how else he could help.

"Stakeout," said Kunikos. "We dress you like a homeless, lie you down on a bench near an entrance, give you bottle of Mad Dog 20-20 and a wire with a lapel mike. You spot the perp, we grab him."

Isaacs was sweating. He turned a pair of pleading eyes to Rigg. "Can I go now?"

Why should you be punished for Casini's Hog? thought Rigg. "Sure," he said.

"But don't leave town," Kunikos added.

There was a Best in Show ribbon taped to his typewriter. There was a box of dog biscuits on his desk with a note that said "FOR INFORMANTS." There was a McGruff poster, a picture of Rin-Tin-Tin, a copy of *Lassie, Come Home*. Kunikos's desk was clean.

Rigg stacked everything to one side.

He rolled a report form into the typewriter, looking around as he did. Everyone in the squad room pretended to be concentrating on paperwork. They always did at this stage.

He was almost through with the report when he was aware of someone standing beside his chair.

"Thought I'd help you out," said Casini, dropping a sheet of paper across Rigg's keyboard. "I checked across the hall. We got lots of dog disappearances. Maybe the start of a crime wave. May need to start a missing dog unit. Call it the Dog-watch. You'd be in line to head it up." He tapped the names on the sheet. "Same neighborhood. That's okay. Don't thank me."

It was a question of hoops. The question was how many would Casini make him jump through.

Complainant, One was a Bev-

erly Korrermann, owner of Pookums, a toy poodle who disappeared when Mrs. Korrermann nodded off on a bench in the sun in Central Park. "When I woke up, Pookums was just gone. There was my leash. There was her collar. No Pookums."

Rigg realized he was rocking back and forth ever so slightly. He stopped. He gritted his teeth instead.

"Could she have slipped the collar?" said Kunikos.

"I don't see how. And she would never run away, never. She's a good dog, I don't care what Peabody says."

"Peabody, ma'am?"

Her nose lifted. "Mr. Ernst Peabody is my across-the-hall neighbor. He is not an animal lover."

"Do you have a picture of Pookums?" Rigg asked.

"I'm afraid not," she said.

"Dolson," said Kunikos, absolutely deadpan, "what about an artist?"

Rigg tried to tell him telepathically that he was going to kill him soon.

"You mean like a sketch artist?" said Mrs. Korrermann, brightening. "A composite picture?"

"We could run her down to headquarters and let Gillian have a go at it," said Kunikos.

"And then we could put up reward posters all around the

neighborhood. What a wonderful idea, don't you think?" Two beaming faces turned toward Rigg.

In the hall, since telepathy hadn't worked, Rigg told Kunikos out loud that he was going to kill him soon.

Complainant Two, Mr. Albert Mara, was convinced that it was Ferris, his neighbor downstairs. "Always bitching, you know?"

The dog kept him awake, or the dog chewed up his newspaper, or the dog dug up his window box. Hey, I told him, you get the ground floor doesn't mean my dog dug up your damn flowers."

"Big dog was he, Mr. Mara?" asked Kunikos.

"You got a saddle, you could ride him. Eat Ferris for breakfast, he mess with me."

"Did Mr. Ferris mess with you, Mr. Mara?"

"Nah, 'course not. I had my dog, didn't I? Until he got rid of him."

"Didn't you say your dog chased a cat?" said Rigg.

"Look, I'm walking the dog, it's night, a guy bumps into me and I lose my grip and there's a cat and bang, the dog is off like a rocket. I chase him to the corner. When I get there, no dog."

"And you think . . ."

"Ferris set it up, didn't he? I think there was a car waiting around the corner. I think my

dog took a one-way ride, you know?"

"Cement overshoes," Kunikos suggested.

"Yeah, exactly. Rubbed out. Hit. Hey, this is New York. You telling me it can't happen?"

Complainant Three, Jackson Marsh, was an investment banker type, all suit and air in an apartment fronting the park, high above the noise of the street. His wife thanked them for coming. She looked drawn. Marsh stood stiffly at the tinted glass doors to the balcony staring across to the East Side, his hands squeezing themselves behind his back. "Jackson . . ." his wife prompted.

He turned and crossed the room toward them. "Three days," he snapped.

"Sir?" said Kunikos. Rigg walked to the glass doors to admire the view. Kunikos could have this one. Kunikos could have it all as far as he was concerned. But he watched their pale reflections in the glass.

"My dog has been stolen. It has been three days, and the police have done nothing. I am a taxpayer, a rather large taxpayer, and—"

"Did you hire a dogwalker, Mr. Marsh?" Kunikos asked. Rigg could hear the hope of conspiracy in his voice, could see Kunikos's face turn his way.

"Don't be absurd. Only I walk

him, isn't that right, dear?" He didn't look at his wife. She nodded.

"When you say 'stolen' . . ."

He had been jogging, as was his habit, in Central Park with his wife and his dog. They were on West Drive between the 79th Street transverse and the 77th Street entrance when something hit him from behind and knocked him down. He looked up from the ground, and some guy was jogging away with his dog.

"Did you chase him?" asked Kunikos.

"Of course I chased him. But my knee was injured, and by the time I got across the bridge, he had disappeared into the Ramble, hadn't he, dear?"

In the glass Rigg could see Kunikos give him a Meaningful Look.

Oh please, Rigg thought.

Kunikos started shooting questions rapid-fire, but Marsh was vague on the particulars. Time? Afternoon, oh, between two and four maybe. Maybe earlier. Height? About six feet, more or less. "But I saw him mostly from my stomach." Age? He hadn't seen his face, but he ran pretty well. Between twenty and forty. Older, if he was in good shape. Race? Well, he had a running suit and a stocking cap on, and he never saw his face. White, probably. But

maybe black. Could be Oriental. Difficult to tell, wouldn't you say so, dear?

Dear nodded.

"Do you have a picture of the dog?" asked Kunikos.

"Dear?"

"A picture of a dog is just a picture," she said, her voice tight. "I know what you want. I'll go."

"Ma'am?" said Rigg.

"You can't tell from a picture. You want a positive I.D. at the morgue on a Jane Doe."

Even Kunikos was silent for a second, but he recovered before Rigg. "That would be a Jane Dog, ma'am—"

"Kunikos . . ."

"—if we did that for dogs. That's just with people."

She blinked uncomprehendingly. "What do they do with dogs?"

Rigg and Kunikos had to admit that they didn't know.

"Go find a picture, dear," Marsh suggested gently. "She's been upset," he added quietly when she left the room. "You know."

She returned with a four by six, which she handed to Rigg, slipping into his palm as she did a folded paper square.

There wasn't much more he could tell them, Marsh said. He appreciated their coming out, he really did, and he was sorry if he had seemed gruff at first, but he

was worried about the dog, and could he have a copy of their report for, you know, insurance? He shook Kunikos's hand and dropped an egalitarian hand on Rigg's shoulder before closing the door behind him.

Waiting for the elevator, the halls empty, Kunikos said, "So they have insurance for dogs."

Rigg felt the corners of the little square of paper in his palm. If he showed it to Kunikos, he'd regret it. He could just slip it into his jacket, read it in the john, flush it. Whatever it was, it was bad news.

He sighed. He held the square up between two fingers. "She passed me this," he said. He unfolded it. They read it together. *He had Whitten killed*, it said.

"Is this a great town or what?" said Kunikos.

"I'm Homicide," said Rigg again. "Not insurance fraud. Not Canicide. Homicide." He dropped the doggie bags with everybody's lunch leftovers one by one into the trashcan.

Kunikos raised a forefinger. "But Casini said—"

"Casini said see the councilman. I did. Casini said see the other complainants. I did. Now I'm typing up the report. Then I'm telling Casini I'll buy him a new Harley. But I'm not giving this a minute more, Kunikos.

You're barking up the wrong tree."

Bryant at the next desk barked twice. From across the room, Washburn howled. Others answered. The squad room sounded like a desert at full moon.

Rigg looked at Casini's door.

"He's out," said Bryant.

"Come on, Rigg," said Kunikos, his hands open. "She said he *had the dog killed*."

Rigg pursed his lips. "You're saying he hired somebody."

Kunikos hesitated. "Well, yeah."

"Hey, Rigg," said Bryant. "This could be big. Tough economy. Maybe the wiseguys are branching out to snuffing poochies."

"And," said Rigg, turning his chair to face Kunikos directly, "you think that these disappearances are connected?"

"Well. Yeah."

"A doggie hit man," said Washburn, staring wistfully into space. "An image not without a certain charm."

"What would he charge?" said Bryant. "Fifty?"

"A hundred," said Lee. "Two fifty to make it look like an accident."

"Five hundred," said Martinez, "to look like a suicide."

"How does a dog commit suicide?" asked Washburn.

"Jump?"

"So what does a dog jumper do, fold its leash neatly by the window before stepping out?"

"And the glasses," said Lee. "They always take their glasses off first."

"I'm serious," said Kunikos.

"Since when?" said Rigg.

"Dolson. Listen. What if I'm right? What if there's something here?"

"Dog smugglers," said Bryant.

"Dog slavers," said Washburn.

"Snatched to Bangkok, to a bowser bordello," said Martinez.

"What will Casini say?" Kunikos was leaning forward.

Rigg flapped his hand. "Casini doesn't care about this."

Kunikos straightened back up. "The councilman cares. Casini cares about what Dorff cares about."

Rigg opened his mouth and closed it. There was that. "Ah, it's nuts. Who'd want to off a dog?"

"Hey," said Bryant, "there's this dog in my building, I'd take out a contract. Little frou-frou Yorkie thing. Bites my ankles in the hall. Then its old lady yells at me for teasing the little mutt. I'd go five hundred, suicide or no."

"I've spent that much in felt and cork," said Washburn, rising to join the group gathering at Rigg's desk. "A yipper in the apartment next door. Little

high-pitched yips at all hours. You gotta soundproof, says the super. So I put felt weather stripping around my door and around my windows, I put cork tiles on my door, on the wall around my door, on my bedroom wall, on the ceiling in my bathroom. There is nothing known to man will stop that yipping."

"Sure there is," said Martinez. "You take a strip of that felt, an inch wide and half a foot long, roll it into a tight little cylinder, and carefully insert it into the trachea. Money-back guarantee."

"There's this guy," said Lee, "around the block from my building, he owns this wolf, I mean wolf, that he walks at dusk. Beast gets even with my building and does his thing. Owner doesn't bother to scoop it up."

"Confront him," said Martinez.

"We're talking wolf."

"You get the feeling that these dogs are mad for being in the city?" said Bryant.

"There's one in my building," Rigg found himself saying, "that wets my newspaper. My Sunday *Times*. They leave them underneath the mailboxes. Every Sunday it beats me down there."

"You should read the *Post*."

"Why? It wouldn't wet it, or it wouldn't matter?"

"So that's why Rigg wants to

drop the case," said Washburn, stroking his chin. "I believe he may himself be interested in engaging certain services."

"What services?" said Rigg. "You guys are nuts."

"Hey, maybe we can get in on it," said Bryant. "It's gotta be a growth industry. We could franchise."

"We'd need a catchy name," said Lee.

"Hair of the Dog."

"Doggotta Non Grata."

"Doggone, Inc."

"See Spot Run."

"Out Damn Spot."

"The Doberman Pinchers."

"What?" said Rigg. "What did you say?"

Bryant shrugged. "The Doberm—"

"No. Before that."

Everybody looked at each other. But Rigg was putting on his jacket. "Somebody said, 'Out Damn Spot,'" he said, pulling Kunikos toward the door.

They stood at the corner of Central Park West and 77th. The American Museum of Natural History rose behind them. They were staring at a lamp-post.

"Well," said Rigg. "You're the conspiracy hound. What do you think?"

The handbill said LADY M'S CLEANING SERVICES ("MAKE YOUR HOME SPOTLESS").

"Sounds like apartment cleaners to me," said Kunikos.

"Look, it's your theory. Dogs disappearing in the neighborhood, dogs that somebody wanted shed of. Maybe this is the connection."

"Lady Macbeth? It's a stretch."

Rigg tore off a tab with the phone number. "It's a literate neighborhood."

At the number was a recording. *Thank you for calling Lady M's. Unfortunately we're all out of the office at the moment, but if you'll leave a number, we'll get back to you.* Rigg hung up without leaving a message.

"If I were running your Murder, Inc., for dogs, that's how I'd do it," said Rigg. "A phone number, a call-back, a meet. Nothing incriminating over the wire. Of course, if I were running a carpet cleaning business out of my home, I'd have a machine taking messages."

"So we set up a meet?" asked Kunikos, absolutely deadpan.

Rigg was aware of the absurdity of the conversation. But. "Not yet."

"We could run Dorff's phone logs," said Kunikos, deadpan still. "And Marsh's."

"Yeah, you sign your name to that request and then explain the dog mafia to Casini."

"So what do we do, boss?"

"I want to play a hunch."

Kunikos feigned surprise. "Regulation Rigg? The man who wrote the book? Old dog, new trick?"

"Let's talk to Isaacs again. His story was too detailed, dogs getting tangled in leashes and all that. He must have seen it. So we tell him we found his dog-walker and need an I.D., and then we take him down and show him the handbill."

"Pretend we know it all, and see what we can pry loose."

"Well," said Rigg. "Yeah."

"Then we could run him in, put him in the box for a while, sweat him."

Rigg stared at Kunikos. Was he serious? Was he playing along with a stupid case, having fun like Rigg was beginning to? Was he making fun of Rigg?

"You're good, Kunikos, you know that?"

Just for an instant, something flickered beneath the deadpan.

They got Isaacs out of his air conditioning and down on the streets and walked him all the way to the park. Isaacs was jumpy, his coat over his shoulder, his tie loose. "He won't see me, right? I can I.D. him from behind a bush or something?"

"Don't worry, sir," said Kunikos earnestly. "Serve and Protect."

They stopped at the corner.

"Okay," said Rigg. "Here it is."

Isaacs glanced around nervously. "Where?"

"Here," said Rigg, tapping the handbill.

They watched for the first reaction. When confronted with what they'd been trying to hide, perps could feign indignation or innocence or ignorance, they could pretend to be outraged or shocked or confused, but unless they were very good indeed, Rigg and Kunikos knew cops would see in that first half second the blanch of recognition, the twitch of an eyebrow, the dilation of a pupil.

Isaacs tried to swallow in a dry throat. "That's not a dog-walking service," he said.

"We can, of course, pull your telephone records," Rigg said.

Isaacs tried to swallow again. "Jeez, you guys don't mess around, do you?"

"What are you drinking?" Rigg said, walking them toward the sidewalk vendors. "My treat."

They sat on the cool granite steps in the shade of the museum's portico and drank Snapple through straws while Isaacs unburdened himself.

"You should have seen the dog. Meanest dog I've ever seen. A malamute. Vicious. He'd growl if you got within ten feet, growl when he inhaled and ex-

haled. It was a demon dog. And Dorff would laugh and laugh."

"So did you get tired of being laughed at or growled at?" asked Rigg.

Isaacs was getting nervous again. "Look, it wasn't me. It was Mrs. Dorff. She was afraid of the dog. It growled at her. It chewed up the apartment. She thinks it killed her cat."

"Did it?"

"Dorff says no. She was gone overnight. Dorff says the cat must have gotten out. She was afraid the dog would attack her, but Dorff wouldn't hear of getting rid of it. Don't show it you're afraid, he'd say, and laugh. He called himself the lone wolf of City Hall."

"And you had to walk the dog?"

"I kept a can of dog Mace in my pocket. I almost bought a gun."

"Some dog," said Kunikos.

"Yeah, and it was still growing."

"So you called Lady M," said Rigg.

He had heard about Lady M from someone in his building. He was told to tie the dog to a certain bench leg in the park and walk away. He was given a cover story. He was to come back for the leash a half hour later.

"What about payment?" asked Rigg.

"Cash taped behind the collar."

"How much?"

"A thousand."

Kunikos whistled.

"What did they do with the dog?" said Rigg.

"They didn't say," said Isaacs. "I didn't ask."

Isaacs had never seen them to ask, it turned out. He had never seen anyone. He couldn't say for sure that the dog wasn't just wandering Central Park on its own. He didn't think he could tell them anything else.

"I was hoping you'd say that," said Kunikos, rising and reaching to the back of his belt. "Up."

Isaacs stood slowly, looking confused.

"Kunikos . . ." said Rigg quietly, staring across Central Park West into all the green.

"Assume the position," said Kunikos to Isaacs.

Rigg turned and stared up at them. Kunikos shook a pair of handcuffs in his direction. "You said we could sweat him downtown."

Isaacs swallowed. "I swear that's it. That's all I know."

Rigg turned back to the park. "Let him go, Kunikos," he said, but he was smiling as he said it.

He was feeling good for a change. He had been tossed a drek job by Casini, and he had solved it, which was more than he or Casini had expected him to

do. Closing the case would make Casini look good. Casini would be grateful. Things were looking up. Rigg was even beginning to think that Kunikos was funny.

He was tempted to let Kunikos run Isaacs in, but he wasn't going to do anything that he didn't clear with Casini first. They'd come back for Isaacs later, with a proper warrant and the boss's blessing.

"We'll do *what*?" Kunikos asked on the way back to the squad room.

Rigg frowned at the tone. "By the book, Kunikos. We're not running him in until we get it okayed."

Kunikos stared at Rigg in much the same way, Rigg thought, that he usually stared at Kunikos.

"You're not joking, are you?" Kunikos said.

Rigg frowned. "About what?"

"We're not going to go after the ring?"

"What ring? Are you nuts?"

"Look, Dolson, you can't do this to Isaacs."

"I'm not doing anything to Isaacs."

"He's a nice guy who was just trying to do Mrs. Dorff a favor."

"What is this, Kunikos, street justice? The law is the law."

"And what you're saying is, to get off the hook with Casini,

you're gonna sacrifice them both."

"If Isaacs wants to give up the wife, that's his lookout."

"And you're just doing your job, right?"

Why did that sound like an accusation? "Right."

Kunikos started to say something but changed his mind. He looked away from Rigg. "Fine. You do the paperwork."

Rigg shrugged. "Fine." Fine indeed. He had no intention of letting Kunikos near the reports anyway, except to sign off on them.

And he had no intention of letting Kunikos spoil his mood. He smiled all the way back to the stationhouse. He smiled right past the remains of Casini's Harley, still roped off behind yellow scene tape. He hadn't been able to see the humor before, but now, well, it *was* funny, in a way. He kept smiling when the desk sergeant, the precinct oracle, gave him a long look and a half smile over his half glasses, the kind of smile that said I'm glad I'm not you.

He doesn't know the case is down, Rigg thought, keeping his smile as he climbed up the stairwell to the squad room, keeping it even when Casini crooked his finger to summon him and Kunikos into the office. Casini was smiling, too.

That wasn't always a good sign.

Rigg thought he heard dogs barking. He straightened his tie and entered the office, still smiling. Casini dropped into his chair and tilted back. He didn't ask them to sit.

"When the call came down from the captain," Casini said, looking only at Rigg, "he tells me about Dorff and the dog. 'Casini,' he says, 'just send somebody over there to make him happy. Take his statement, say you'll look into it, that'll be it.'" Casini smiled. Rigg felt his own smile start melting back into his face. "So what do I get? I get a couple of clowns talking dog conspiracies. Comedians. I'm laughing. Ha. Ha."

Rigg cleared his throat.

"The captain just got another call from Dorff," said Casini, "praising these two detectives who just took his assistant out for the second time to retrace the kidnapping route."

"Dognapping, sir," said Kunikos.

"Tell him not to push this," said Casini, not taking his eyes off Rigg.

Rigg turned his glare on Kunikos, who blinked, twice.

"So now we got this councilman who expects results," said Casini. "That's bad enough. Then the captain also gets a phone call from this"—he looks

down at a pink phone message—"this Marsh guy. Marsh must have seen some other detectives than Dorff saw. The ones that saw Marsh were—" he glanced at the sheet—"highly offensive." They didn't take him seriously. They upset his wife. They talked about a doggie morgue. A doggie morgue and coming in to I.D. the body." Casini's smile spread. It was a ghastly thing to see. "Marsh's wife is the mayor's first cousin."

"Lieutenant . . ." began Rigg.

"And," said Casini, "I got four or five people downstairs with their doggies. They want their doggies pawprinted. They want their pictures taken for a doggie I.D. file in case they get kidnapped. They want dental records."

"Lieutenant . . ."

"And even as we speak, Mrs. Kibbles from the planet Pluto is in with Gillian right now, having her missing dog sketched."

"Mrs. Korrmann," groaned Rigg.

"All you had to do, Rigg, was go out there and listen to Dorff. A simple job. Now he expects results, and the captain is getting calls and I'm getting calls and the goldfish owners are going to be in here soon demanding that we serve and protect them, too. The Harley wasn't enough, was it, Rigg?"

"Lieutenant . . ."

Casini raised his palm and closed his eyes. "I don't care where you go. Sex Crimes. Narcotics. Property. But I want you out of here. Both of you. Today."

The only thing Rigg could think to say was that he really, really hadn't seen the Harley, but before he could say even that, Kunikos said that they could get Dorff his dog back.

Casini opened one eye. "What?" he asked as if checking his hearing and looking at Kunikos for the first time.

"We can get Dorff his dog." Now Kunikos didn't blink at all.

Rigg felt suddenly lightheaded. He tried to keep the wild panic from his eyes as Casini swiveled his gaze toward him.

"What?" Casini said as if Kunikos hadn't said anything.

"Well," said Rigg, trying to talk around the boulder in his throat, "we *have* had some leads open up . . ."

"Leads?" Casini exploded. "This isn't a case. This is PR. This is, frankly, payback, Rigg, as you well know. I don't know what you think it is, but . . ."

"We'll need a wire," said Kunikos.

Casini stopped mid-sentence, his mouth still open for the next word.

That's it, thought Rigg. Sex Crimes was too good to hope for. He'd be headed back to Traffic as soon as Casini saw the poetic

justice, the sweet irony, of such a transfer. And he was going to kill Kunikos as soon as he could. The only question was how.

"A wire?" said Casini, leaning across his desk on his knuckles, leaning toward Rigg.

"Yessir," said Kunikos, "if we want to . . ."

Casini cut Kunikos off. To Rigg he said, "I want to hear you say it."

Rigg didn't see a whole bunch of options opening up in front of him. "We need a wire," he said trying to squeeze some conviction into his voice.

Casini leaned back, quiet. Rigg was afraid he was going to pull his service piece and open up. As long as he shot Kunikos first, it would be . . .

"I'll sign off on the wire," said Casini. "You get me Dorff's dog, you keep your gold shields. For now."

Rigg looked at Kunikos. Kunikos's face was as dead as ever.

"It'll buy us time," Kunikos said again, backing up the one last step between him and the lockers.

Rigg advanced and poked him again in the chest with his index finger. "Time enough to find Dorff's dog?" His voice echoed off tile.

"Time enough for this to all blow over," said Kunikos, ges-

turing for Rigg to keep his voice down.

Rigg had his index finger cocked for another jab. He tilted his head and squinted his eyes and waited.

"What else could we do?" said Kunikos. "Ask for the transfer forms?"

Well, there was that. Casini hadn't offered many options. Maybe . . . "So you mean you weren't just being Kunikos?"

Kunikos pretended he didn't know what being Kunikos meant. "I was trying to bail us out of a bad situation."

"Yeah," said Rigg, "well, what's all this wire stuff, then? A wire on a lost dog? We're lucky he didn't . . ."

"We had to ask for the wire so Casini would think we're serious."

Rigg relaxed his finger. Whether Kunikos was playing straight with him or not, Rigg had to admit that it had worked. At the least, Kunikos had delayed the inevitable.

"I want to go back to what I was last week," said Rigg to no one in particular. "I want a desk in the corner and a regular partner. I want a nice, clean murder."

"A few days," said Kunikos. "Some paperwork, some stroking here and there, nothing pans out, everything blows over, all forgotten."

Rigg nodded. Maybe. "But he'll never forget the Harley."

"Oh, I don't know," said Kunikos, deadpan but with the tiny glint in his eye that Rigg was beginning to recognize. "His bark is. . ." He broke off, looking carefully at Rigg's face. "Maybe I'd better just shut up now."

Rigg refused to make the call to Lady M's himself. Kunikos could be the one to be humiliated. Rigg listened on an extension. They got the answering machine again. Rigg made Kunikos leave his cell phone number.

So now they'd wait for a call-back and it would turn out to be apartment cleaners after all, and they'd have to pretend to be making progress for Casini while hoping that things would settle down and go away. Maybe he could hire the cleaners to do his apartment, if they weren't too steep and he still had a paycheck coming in. He turned his back to Kunikos and started typing the reports.

Rigg was halfway through his second page when Kunikos's cell phone started growling. Kunikos held it away from his ear so Rigg could listen.

The voice on the phone was ambiguous of gender, elusive about the matter at hand.

I have a spot problem, Kunikos said.

Was it a big spot or a little one?

A big one.

Had he heard about their services from a customer?

Yes.

That was fine, then. Would he be available for a meeting to discuss needs?

Yes, Kunikos said.

The voice suggested tomorrow at noon, Central Park, the bench under Robert Burns.

Kunikos agreed. That was it. Dial tone. Kunikos hung up.

"The Literary Walk," Kunikos said.

"Thank God not the Ramble," Rigg said. "I got into the Ramble once and thought I was never coming out. It was worse than being lost in Bloomingdale's."

With the meet set, they had to go downtown and pick up the wire, which Rigg didn't want to do but it was not the kind of thing he trusted Kunikos with, not without a handler. So he went, and he made Kunikos stand behind him while he shoved the paperwork across the counter to the bug man, a skinny little uniform finishing his tuna sandwich.

The bug man lifted his chin to look through his glasses at the form. "Got just what you need,"

he said, excited. "Just came in. A sweet little Japanese job. All digital, two hours. No tape, a little chip."

Then he vanished.

Rigg turned to give Kunikos a good-boy-but-keep-muzzled look.

The bug man reappeared with a black square the size of a book of bar matches. "If it's drugs, hide it in your crotch. They'll never pat you down there. OC, they might make a soldier give you a good grab. Is it drugs?" He looked hopeful.

Rigg put the heel of his shoe gently across Kunikos's toes behind him. "Not drugs."

"Oh, well, doesn't matter." He pushed it across the counter. "This is a honey."

Rigg reached for it.

A frown crossed the bug man's face. He didn't lift his hand. "Say," he said, "you're not the dog guys, are you?"

Rigg tried to pull the wire in his direction. "Dog guys?"

At his back Kunikos made a soft growling sound.

The bug man tightened his grip. "You can't have this."

Rigg pulled harder. "Kidnaping. Insurance scam."

"A big case comes down and I let the dog guys take the good stuff, guess who gets chewed on?"

Rigg pulled harder. He was tired of the disrespect, tired of

the jokes. He wanted the good wire. He leaned back for leverage, coming down on Kunikos's foot. Kunikos yipped and jumped back. Rigg lost his grip. The bug man staggered back with his prize.

"Sorry," the bug man said, standing just out of Rigg's reach. "Be right back."

"Why did you step on my toe?" Kunikos said.

"Why did you growl?"

"My stomach growled."

"This," said the bug man, pushing two Walkman-sized units across the counter, "is one of the best."

"Just how old is that?" Rigg asked.

"Been around a long time. Like I said, reliable. One of you wears the transmitter, one wears the tape."

"You're kidding, right?"

"It acts up on you, just give it a whack."

"In the crotch?" Kunikos asked.

"Too big for the crotch. You got to tape it to your body somewhere."

"Got any suggestions?" Rigg asked.

"Yeah. Somewhere so the red light won't be seen. You run out of tape or you're not transmitting, the red light comes on. Had a deep cover try to convince his drug contact that it was the light on his pacemaker."

Rigg reached for the equipment. "Great."

"Did it work?" Kunikos asked.

"The pacemaker bit?"

"Nah. They shot him."

Rigg leaned over the counter. "Then how did you know about the pacemaker bit?"

The bug man gave a weak smile. "Got it on tape. The transmitter was fine. The red light malfunctioned is all."

So the next day Rigg stood at the 69th Street entrance to the park at eleven fifteen trying to reconstruct precisely the steps that had led him to this spot at this time, as if understanding that would explain the end of a promising career. There were no precise steps he could trace. It seemed chaotic, random; it was connected with Kunikos and dogs and motorcycles, but there was no logic to it, no cause and effect. He wouldn't mind losing his job so much if he just could make sense of it all. He scratched absently at the microphone itching beneath his shirt. The Walkman part was taped to his side. He'd probably soak the tape off in the tub and take the waterlogged unit back to the bug man so no one else would have to use it and so he wouldn't have to go through the agony of ripping off the tape.

He entered the park. A dog

barked at him from the path ahead. He took the right fork to cut behind the Sheep Meadow, hoping it would be less crowded, but he found dogs all around him, big dogs on stout leashes filling the path, nuzzling and bumping and sniffing each other; a manic pair of white Scottish terriers underfoot, searching for that perfect and familiar spot by the tree, being pulled back from bushes where signs warned of rat poison; a spaniel on a lead that rolled up like a measuring tape into a huge plastic housing, dog extending himself across Rigg's path, dog being reeled back in; a pale-eyed husky, wolf on a red cloth leash; a thin whippet with the quick, birdlike head movements of the too-long inbred sniffing at Rigg's leg tentatively. Rigg shook his leg in warning. The dog blinked at him, reminding him of Kunikos's innocent deadpan. Rigg quickened his pace to escape the dogs and found the bench at the feet of Robert Burns across from Sir Walter Scott.

Even Sir Walter had a dog beside him as he sat in his bronze chair, a big dog, huge and furry, pointed nose. Scott, deep in thought, robe across his lap, pen raised, ignoring his book, stared at the water fountain down toward Will Shakespeare, or maybe the trashcan wired to

the rail, as if wondering why someone might want to steal a trashcan. And Scott's dog, lying beside the chair, apparently faithful, stared beyond his pensive master, looking hopefully at the squirrels in the trees above him.

And everybody, Scott, the dog, the people striding past, everybody ignored Kunikos lying curled on the bench to Scott's right, just another bum sleeping on a park bench.

It just made no sense. Rigg had always played things by the book, always been careful and thorough and, well, deliberate, like a ship on a long voyage, setting his course. Next year, or the year after, that course should have taken him to lieutenant, to commander, then, according to plan, captain, grey at the temples, a touch of paunch befitting the weight of his responsibilities. He didn't belong here, sitting on a bench under the nostrils of Robert Burns, across from Kunikos, setting up a dog-napper in a sting that would never work, and even if it did was a joke that would chain his name to Kunikos forever. Rigg and Kunikos. A dead Harley and a missing dog, and he might spend a huge chunk of the rest of his detective life harnessed to Kunikos instead of sailing steadily on. The future captain felt like howling at the sky.

Across the Literary Walk, Kunikos hadn't moved. Rigg dropped his chin toward his chest and barked into the microphone. Kunikos still didn't stir. A couple of passersby eyed Rigg and quickened their own pace. Rigg felt his face go red. What was he doing? Was he crazy?

And then, suddenly, it *did* make sense. He was being set up.

Casini's revenge. There was no meet. Oh, someone would show, and Rigg would do his usual thorough job, only he was the one who was being taped, not her. She was a plant, probably an undercover from another precinct, sent by Casini to lead Rigg into idiocy on tape.

And Kunikos, of course, Kunikos was in on it, had been from the beginning. And Isaacs. A thousand dollars to off a dog—they really thought he was a complete idiot, didn't they?

And Dorff and Marsh. Probably Dorff hadn't lost a dog at all.

So they'd make a tape of Rigg making a fool of himself, and Casini would play it for the whole squad room, maybe the whole precinct at the year-end Precinct Roast. Casini might even have a video camera set up nearby.

Rigg forced himself not to look around too obviously. Up the walk a young mom was appar-

ently shooting tape of her precious little baby.

Rigg smiled.

If they wanted a show, he'd give them a show. He'd show them. He'd out Kunikos Kunikos.

He opened the *Times* and pretended to read.

Shadows crawled across the newspaper. Noon came and went. Rigg was eager for "Lady M" but was determined not to plan anything, determined to act on impulse, to say whatever popped into his head. Like Kunikos.

He looked at Kunikos.

Kunikos hadn't budged, might be dead for all Rigg knew, but he wasn't going to check on him. Nor were any of the people flowing by. Rigg imagined coming back tomorrow to see if Kunikos were still here, finding him stiffened on the bench, another statue in the park. He could tell Casini that Kunikos had died in the line of duty. There would be a funeral. Rigg would get to wear his dress blues, would drop the first fistful of dirt onto the closed coffin because he was Kunikos's partner, no, his *former* partner. He'd brush the dirt lightly from his white gloves, careful not to rub it into the fabric, and then . . .

The bench shifted and creaked as someone sat down on the other end. Rigg turned a page and

eased out a long, slow breath before glancing over.

White female, forty-five to fifty, expensive clothes, imported handbag, gold watch, lighting a purple cigarette, a toy poodle on a silver lead staring at Rigg.

Not Lady M, thought Rigg, turning away. Too old for an undercover. Great. Nothing was going right.

The poodle let out a toy growl. Rigg looked. It bared its toy teeth.

"Non, non, Nancy," said the woman, snapping the lead. "Nancy, non, non." She gave Rigg an apologetic look.

Go away, Rigg thought as hard as he could, even though telepathy had never worked with Kunikos.

"You are not a dog person, I think," she said. Her English was only slightly accented. "Neither am I."

So it *was* Lady M. Oh, were Kunikos and Casini good. They figured he'd get wise, so they sent someone he wouldn't expect.

"But you have a dog," he said.

"Ah, but I *like* the city," she said. "Dog people hate the city. Therefore, I am not a dog person."

"You're a cat person, then," said Rigg.

The corners of her mouth curved downward, and she

opened her hands. "No. But cat people, too, like the city. Here they thrive. Dog people, they hate the pavement, the stink, the shadows of buildings. They want open air. They want grass, horizons. They become neurotic in the city. Many become mean." She scratched Nancy's ears.

"Neurotic dogs?" Rigg asked.

She shrugged.

A Rollerblader zipped past, towed by a great Dane on a long black leash.

Rigg smiled.

It was time.

He turned to face her directly. "So," he said slowly and distinctly, "when do we do it?"

Under her makeup she seemed to turn pale, and across the walk, Kunikos shifted on his bench.

"I beg your pardon?" she asked a bit stiffly.

"Get rid of my spot problem. Off the dog."

She laughed nervously. "These American idioms . . ." she began.

"Where do you dump the bodies? I figure the marshes around JFK. Of course, they're pretty full, what with the mob hits and all, but I think, hey, dogs aren't people." He pointed at Nancy. "This little mouthful you could fit in a shoebox, I bet. She your next victim?"

Kunikos sat up. Ha! Rigg thought. Gotcha. Now, how long

before he could get "Lady M" to give it up or start laughing.

Lady M reached slowly for her poodle and lifted her carefully, as if afraid that a sudden move might set Rigg off. Her smile was desperate.

"How does someone join your outfit?" Rigg said, leaning toward her. "I'm a fair shot, and I don't like dogs."

"If you will excuse me," she said, standing slowly.

Rigg rose with her.

"Maybe you don't dump the bodies. Dogfood, maybe? Nice irony there." Rigg smiled. Lady M started backing away, Rigg matching her steps. She was good, Rigg thought. Almost as good as Kunikos. She was very pale.

She was too pale.

Something was wrong.

Kunikos was off the bench and coming up behind her.

Rigg went cold. She wasn't the plant. She was just some lady walking her dog, and she thought he was a crazy person. She was backing away, and Kunikos was coming up behind her.

"I can explain," Rigg said, reaching out to stop her. "I thought you were a fake dognapper."

She raised Nancy like a gun between herself and Rigg. Nancy growled.

"I can explain," Rigg said.

Kunikos was beside him, dressed like a bum, smelling like a bum. If he had come to explain to the lady what was going on, his appearance wasn't going to help. "You're under arrest," Kunikos said.

"Kunikos," Rigg yelled. "Not now!"

The woman began screaming.

Rigg raised his palms to her. "I'm leaving now, I'm sorry, I'm going now."

"You're under arrest," Kunikos said.

She just stood there and screamed again.

Passersby started slowing and staring from safe distances.

Rigg edged between her and Kunikos. "Please," he said to her. "Please."

"Police!" she screamed. "Police!"

Rigg pulled out his shield. "I am the police."

She screamed louder.

Kunikos pulled out his shield. "I'm the police. You're under arrest. Please lay down your dog."

"Kunikos!" Rigg said. He used his elbows to keep Kunikos behind him. "Go, ma'am, just go."

"Drop your dog, lady, you're under arrest," Kunikos said.

Rigg reached for her arm to turn her around and get her moving away from them, and Nancy lunged and clamped down on his fingers. Rigg yelled and jerked back, and for a sec-

ond Nancy hung in the air, a white furry fish dangling on the end of his arm. He shook her to the ground and she scrambled to her feet, straining at her lead, trying to get his ankles.

Kunikos was laughing, Nancy barking, Lady M screaming, Rigg bleeding and dancing away from Nancy's nipping teeth, and the crowd was getting bigger. A uniform from the park precinct pulled up in his little blue and white golf cart and asked what was going on. Rigg looked at Kunikos because he sure as hell didn't know.

Kunikos showed the uniform his shield. "We're arresting this woman," he said. "Her dog bit my partner here."

Rigg held out his fingers for inspection.

The uniform leaned slightly away even though he was well out of Rigg's reach. He stared at them as if trying to decide if he really wanted to be involved in this.

"Just imagine the paperwork," said Kunikos.

The uniform put his cart into gear and pattered away.

Kunikos turned to the woman. "Lady M, I presume."

Rigg left them arguing on the bench.

He needed to wash out his bite, but he wasn't about to stand in line at the public rest-

room on the other side of the Sheep Meadow, clutching his hand discreetly, fingers oozing the occasional drop of blood. And he wasn't going to the park precinct to clean up, or to his own precinct, and he wasn't going to call the park ambulance to come dress his fingers. He'd had enough mortification for the day.

He bought a bottle of Evian from a vendor and flashed his shield over protests when he took a fistful of napkins from the cart, the vendor muttering as Rigg walked back to the bench.

Kunikos and the woman were still arguing.

Rigg sat, pretending not to know them, washing his bleeding fingers with water from the French Alps, trying to figure out, as the uniform had asked, just what in hell was going on.

"I do not know who you think I am, this Lady M," the woman was saying, clutching the dog to her chest and tilting away, sniffing either in disdain or at the atmosphere hovering about Kunikos.

"We know who you are," Kunikos said, "and we have ways of making you talk."

"Shut up, Kunikos," Rigg said automatically.

The woman leaned around Kunikos to address Rigg. "If you are a policeman, you should be ashamed."

"You have no idea," Rigg said, watching the Evian pooling between his shoes. Kunikos being Kunikos. And who *was* this person? A passerby? Lady M? A Kunikos plant, running the long con on him? The napkins disintegrated on his fingers and stuck to his skin.

"What if he gets rabies?" Kunikos said. "My partner—"

"I'm not your partner."

"—dying of hydrophobia."

The woman squeezed the dog tighter to her chest, indignant. "Nancy has all of her shots."

"You got a license to carry that thing?" Kunikos said. He turned to Rigg. "You think that would qualify as a concealed weapon?"

Rigg looked away as if he were accidentally on the bench, too polite to leave, too self-possessed to be bothered. But people were staring again.

"This is not justice," said the woman to his back, her voice rising. "Take me to your headquarters. My, how do you say, lawyer . . ."

"That's it," said Rigg, standing. They could do this elsewhere. Anywhere elsewhere. "Cuff her."

"You wouldn't," the woman said. Kunikos looked mildly surprised.

"Allow me," Rigg said. "Kunikos, take the dog. I'll cuff Lady M here, or whoever you are." He

waved her up. "Hands behind your back, thumbs up."

Kunikos reached for the dog. She shrank away, blocking him with her shoulder.

"Fine," Rigg said. "Call animal control."

"Don't they sacrifice the dog to do a rabies test?" Kunikos asked, producing a walkie-talkie from somewhere in his rags.

"Used to."

"Wait," said the woman.

"Can I put her in the box?" Kunikos said.

"Put her in the pound if you want," said Rigg. "It's not going to get us Dorff's dog back."

"Wait," the woman said again. "Wait. Please."

Kunikos lifted the walkie-talkie to his mouth.

"What if I could get you the dog you want?"

Kunikos and Rigg looked at each other.

"Where'd your accent go?" Kunikos said.

"Dorff's dog?" Rigg said.

"If I could," she said. "What if I could?"

An hour later Rigg found himself sitting on a bench down the hill from the Literary Walk, just beyond the tunnel beneath the East Drive, across from the statue of Balto, the sled dog. At his feet, attached to his wrist by the silver lead, sat Nan-

cy, her head twitching to follow the foot traffic swirling by.

Nancy was his hostage.

He could feel the sun through his thinning hair, falling, he imagined, on his thinning brain. But he couldn't blame Kunikos for this one. Keeping the little dog as hostage had been his idea.

Another passerby bent over Nancy, an attractive woman in her late twenties wearing a tank top. "Oh, how precious," she cooed stroking the poodle's nut-sized head. "What's her name?"

"Nancy," Rigg said, trying to sound polite but distant.

He could be the worst kind of monster, but the dog made him safe. Every two or three minutes someone would stop to talk to the dog and pet her and then talk to Rigg. Total strangers in New York, in Central Park, for chrissakes. Want to meet people? Make friends? Get dates? Walk a pocket dog in the park.

But they made Rigg nervous. One might be from Lady M, a doublecross. Instead of bringing the dogs, Dorff's and Marsh's, for the swap, they'd steal Nancy back—stomp Rigg's foot, slice the leash, snatch the dog, run. That's why Kunikos was lounging in the grass next to his mountain bike, in his rainbow helmet, pink bike jersey, wing-shaped sunglasses, and spray-

on bike pants. How Kunikos had gotten the pants on Rigg couldn't imagine. It was embarrassing to look at him. But a snatcher wouldn't get thirty yards before Kunikos ran up his back with those knobby tires.

The twenty-something moved on. Another kid climbed on Balto. Balto's back gleamed gold in the sun, polished by the jeans of ten thousand children a year. Kids couldn't resist Balto the hero, leading the team that relayed antitoxin to Nome in the winter of 1925. Balto, his back shining, still in harness, looking eager and friendly, gazed with confidence across the hill. Endurance. Fidelity. Intelligence.

A real dog, thought Rigg.

Nancy sat on his foot.

He resisted the urge to see how high he could boost her, imagined a really solid kick, watched the dog fading against the blue blue sky.

He didn't dare. The whole thing hinged on Nancy's being important to Lady M, or whoever she was. He reached down to scratch her ears. Nancy gave a low growl. He sat back up and wiped his fingertips on his pants.

Lady M wouldn't give her name. They couldn't force it. She had something they wanted, and if they ran her in and put her through the system, they

might not get it. And to avoid being put through the system, she was willing to give them what they wanted. "If you want an arrest, I can't stop you," she had said. "But if you want the dog, I can help you."

It wasn't what Rigg liked to think of as justice. It wasn't regulation. "I don't like street justice," he'd said to Kunikos.

Kunikos had shrugged. "Upscale street. Avenue justice. Central Park West justice."

Rigg had held out for Marsh's dog, too. If it worked, at least Mrs. Marsh could get her dog back.

If it worked. If Lady M really cared what happened to this furry thing sitting on his shoe.

If she didn't, what had happened to him so far at the station, with Casini, with the jokes, would be prelude only.

Kunikos mounted his bike and rode around the large triangle of intersecting paths to Rigg's left. Nancy got off his shoe, sniffed around a bit, sat on his other shoe.

Then, to his right, emerging from the tunnel, was Lady M walking two dogs, Alexander Dorff and Whitten Marsh. She crossed to his bench and sat close to him, as if she knew him. Nancy growled. "Non, non, Nancy," she said, handing Rigg her two leads and lifting Nancy to

her. As simple as that. The swap was done.

But she didn't leave right away. "I won't be followed?" she said.

"You won't be followed," Rigg said.

"You don't mind leaving first, then." She glanced to her left, toward Kunikos. "With your friend."

"We'll leave first."

But he didn't stand.

Lady M smiled and lit a purple cigarette with a gold lighter. "You have, maybe, a question?" she said, a faint accent returning.

"Suppose," said Rigg, "that in this service economy some enterprising souls offered a way to relieve others of the burden of irritating pets, theirs or other people's. Let's say dogs. What do you suppose might happen to those hypothetical dogs?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said, her accent fading into the air like the smoke from her cigarette. "It would depend. Maybe the dog would be taken someplace where there's less concrete and more light. It's a big country beyond the Hudson."

"You don't think the dogs would just be killed and their bodies dumped somewhere?"

She laughed and shook her head. "You need to cross the Hudson yourself once in a while."

He couldn't argue with that. "Well," he said, "thank you, especially for this one." He rubbed Whitten's head. "Mrs. Marsh will be very happy to get him back. I'm not sure that Mrs. Dorff will feel the same way about that one."

"Oh, I don't know. She might find him changed."

"It's been less than a week. He couldn't be trained that fast, could he?"

"Let's just say," Lady M said, looking carefully at Rigg with a knowing and enigmatic smile, "that he's not the dog he was."

Rigg smiled back.

He left her on the bench, walking through the tunnel with the dogs, Kunikos pedaling beside him. They cut through the Literary Walk and turned up the path toward the West 69th Street entrance.

At the back of the Sheep Meadow they came upon a statue standing obscurely in the shadows, off the main paths. Rigg let the dogs sniff around the base and relieve themselves on the stone while he stared at the figures above him. It was a bronze of an American Indian and his wolflike dog in frozen motion, muscles tense, staring away in the same direction, almost as if dog and man were both pointing, both attuned to the same things, both alert, anxious, tense. The dog's teeth

were bared in a soundless snarl, the Indian's right hand, wound in a leather leash, clutched the dog's fur at the neck to restrain him, maybe to comfort him. The Indian leaned forward over his dog, bow slung on his shoulder, arrow tight in his hand, ready to whip both into position if what he and the dog saw proved threatening or hostile. Rigg turned his eyes to follow their stare. He saw only the creeping growth of the city. No enemy there for teeth and arrowheads.

He snapped the leash and pulled the dogs along, turning up the asphalt path along the chain link fence of the Sheep Meadow, Kunikos hunched over his handlebars, his feet spinning absurdly fast in his lowest gear as his bike crawled ahead of them, the dogs bumping and sniffing after the bike, twining leads and checking everything out, Rigg pretending that he didn't know Kunikos and that the dogs weren't with him.

They passed, in the trees by the fence, a young couple playing with a huge dog they called Bidly, throwing a Frisbee as far as they could, Bidly shooting across sunlight and shadow while they ducked behind a tree, Bidly not fooled, streaking straight to them, tearing the grass and the dirt in her eager speed.

The Sheep Meadow was full of

dogs like Bidly, Rigg thought. Dogs catching Frisbees, looking for sheep.

Casini wanted to deliver the dog to Dorff personally. Rigg didn't put up even token resistance and gave Kunikos the evil eye before he could say otherwise. Rigg did ask, though, that he be allowed to return the Marsh dog.

Casini was in a generous mood. "Whatever," he said. "Then we'll go bust this dognapping ring. Great stuff here."

Rigg looked at Kunikos, who smiled back at him, blank and innocent.

Casini squinted at Rigg. "What?"

Rigg cleared his throat. "We made a deal, lieutenant."

"What deal?"

"We got the dogs for making the charges go away."

"Wait a minute, Rigg. You're telling me that *you* made a deal? On the street? No lawyers, no bosses, no book?" Casini looked at Kunikos as if to say, *Rigg did this, not you?*

"I was proud of him, sir," Kunikos said. "Like he'd been doing it for years."

Casini turned his squint back to Rigg. "Don't go going wonky on me. I need somebody who's stable. I got enough cowboys. And I want this ring, I don't care

what deal you think you made.”

So, Rigg thought. Casini had promised something to somebody higher up the line. Well, it had been nice being sergeant, but a deal was a deal, even on the street.

“Lieutenant Casini, I—”

“Told you, Rigg,” said Kunikos, rubbing his hands together. “I knew it wouldn’t stand up. Let’s get the warrants.”

Rigg had heard that great ballplayers, kneeling in the on-deck circle, visualize themselves connecting, see a solid hit. He had heard that the technique was often effective. He visualized standing behind Kunikos in the locker room, his fingers tightening around Kunikos’s throat.

“And, lieutenant,” said Kunikos, continued, “a favor? Could I be the one to collar Mrs. Dorff? You can have Isaacs,” he added to Rigg.

“Whoa, whoa, wait a minute here,” Casini said. “Mrs. Dorff?”

The blank and innocent look floated back to the surface of Kunikos’s face. “She hired the dognappers. She took out a contract on her husband’s dog. I mean, we might even cut a deal with Lady M for testimony, you think? That’s how it works, right? Throw the small fry back for the big fish?” He blinked, waiting.

Casini tapped a pencil point

on his teeth. “Well, you know, we did get the dogs back, and now we got this Lady M on the street. She might turn into a good informant. Tell you what. Let’s not bring the ring in yet. That suit you boys?”

“Yes, sir,” said Rigg.

“Whatever you think best, sir,” said Kunikos. “As always.”

Dorff was effusive, pumping their hands, slapping their backs, punching their shoulders. Casini was appropriately humble, delighted with the flow of praise, but Rigg, knowing that sooner or later Dorff would see that Alexander was somewhat changed, believed he understood more clearly what the citizens of Pompeii felt as the rumblings continued and they looked up at the darkening sky. He took the pale Mrs. Dorff by the elbow and led her into the kitchen.

She turned to Rigg. “You’re going to arrest me, aren’t you?”

Rigg pulled out a chair for her. “No, ma’am.”

She looked doubtful. “Or tell my husband?”

Rigg shook his head.

She sank into the chair. “It would be worth it. It would be worth going to jail. I can’t live in the same house with that awful dog, that monster.”

“Mrs. Dorff,” Rigg began reassuringly.

"You don't know," she said. "You don't understand. It's a demon. It's not a dog at all."

"It's not the same dog, that's for sure," Kunikos said.

Mrs. Dorff looked angry. "I'd recognize that thing anywhere."

"Yes, ma'am," said Rigg. "I know you would. But Detective Kunikos is right. It's not the same dog."

She stared and frowned as if she thought Rigg were as crazy as Kunikos.

"It is," said Kunikos, "about ninety-eight percent the same dog." Kunikos smiled at her.

She looked at Rigg. Rigg smiled.

Then she smiled, slowly at first, as if not daring to hope, then broadly. Then she started giggling, and Kunikos snorted and Rigg laughed, and they all tried to laugh silently, holding their sides, tears streaming.

When they had regained some composure, Rigg and Kunikos excused themselves to return the dog to the Marshes. Kunikos was all for letting Casini stay to bask in Dorff's warmth a while longer, which Casini clearly wanted to do, but Rigg, imagining the consequences to him personally if Casini were there when Dorff discovered which one percent of his dog was missing, managed to drag his lieutenant from the apartment.

Just as the elevator doors

snipped shut, Rigg thought he heard from somewhere down the hall someone shouting, "Hey! What the hell is this?"

Mrs. Marsh dropped to her knees and buried her face in her dog's thick fur. "Oh, thank you, thank you."

Behind her, standing pale and grim, Marsh managed to part his lips. "Yes. Thank you, officer."

It was the same kind of thank you Rigg had heard when he was a rookie, working traffic. You'd pull a speeder or a stop sign runner, write them a ticket for a hundred, and the last thing they'd say was, "Thank you, officer."

Rigg raised his eyes to Marsh's. "You're welcome." Marsh knew that they knew. Rigg could see it in his face. He thought he'd drive the point home. "My advice, Mr. Marsh—keep your eye on the dog. We're glad things worked out this time. We couldn't guarantee they'd work out again."

Mrs. Marsh looked up at Rigg, then to her husband, then back to Rigg. She knew, too. And she knew that Marsh knew that Rigg knew. And Marsh knew she knew. And, Rigg knew, neither she nor her husband would ever talk about it. She wouldn't need to. And he wouldn't dare.

The whole thing was, Rigg felt, satisfactory.

The whole thing was most satisfactory indeed, Rigg thought the next morning, heading back to the squad. Out of the doghouse. Justice done. Well, justice of a sort. And he'd survived Casini. He'd survived Kunikos. He'd been a good sport at the bar, even with Kunikos's interminable puns, even when the squad presented him with the framed picture of dogs playing poker, complete with pawprint autographs.

In the parking garage, a car was parked in the space where he had killed the Harley. Casini's crime scene tape was gone, the body removed.

It was good to be back. He even smiled at Kunikos.

Rigg was finishing the last of the Dorff paperwork when he caught out of the corner of his eye Casini approaching his desk with a smile and a file folder, a plain manila folder, no color coding.

Something sensitive, then. Too delicate to run through the system. Rigg kept the smile inside. Another juicy case. He pretended not to see Casini until the folder dropped beside his elbow. He looked up, expecting to be briefed, but Casini was already heading back to his office.

Too sensitive even to discuss in the squad, Rigg thought with satisfaction.

He flipped the file open. A single sheet. A bill of some kind. Fraud, then. Let's see. An estimate. Itemized. For the repair of a motorcycle, a Harley-Dav—

His eyes dropped to the total. He felt his blood sink away from his brain, into his shoes.

"That's just the estimate," said Casini as he walked away. "The final bill can't be more than twenty percent above that."

"My whole car didn't cost that much," Rigg said.

"Your car," said Casini, "is a dog."

Behind Rigg, Kunikos growled.

UNSOLVED

by
Robert Kesling

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the July/August double issue.

Five young couples, including Mr. and Mrs. Roper, recently moved into the Welcome Arms Apartments, one couple on each of the five floors. Each husband followed a different profession (one was an auditor), and each couple enjoyed a different sport for recreation (one went fishing). It seemed idyllic—on the surface.

Nevertheless, one man and one woman living there began carrying the "welcome arms" bit a little too far: they began an illicit affair. The situation was destined to end tragically. One of the lovers, fearing exposure, wanted to end the relationship. The other protested. They argued violently. In the heat of the moment, one struck and killed the other.

(1) Norma and her husband lived in the apartment just below the couple who played tennis.

(2) Neither Earl nor Mr. Parks was married to Karen, to the lady who played tennis, or to the wife on the third floor.

(3) Laura lived somewhere higher in the building than Andy. Laura and Mrs. Queen (neither of whom became the victim or the killer) were not married to Andy, to the editor, or to the man who relaxed at golf.

(4) Mr. and Mrs. Smith (neither of whom was the killer) occupied the apartment just below the swimming enthusiasts and just above Carl.

(5) The contractor lived immediately below the man who enjoyed sailing and just above Mr. Tabor. None of the three was married to Norma. They did not include the killer.

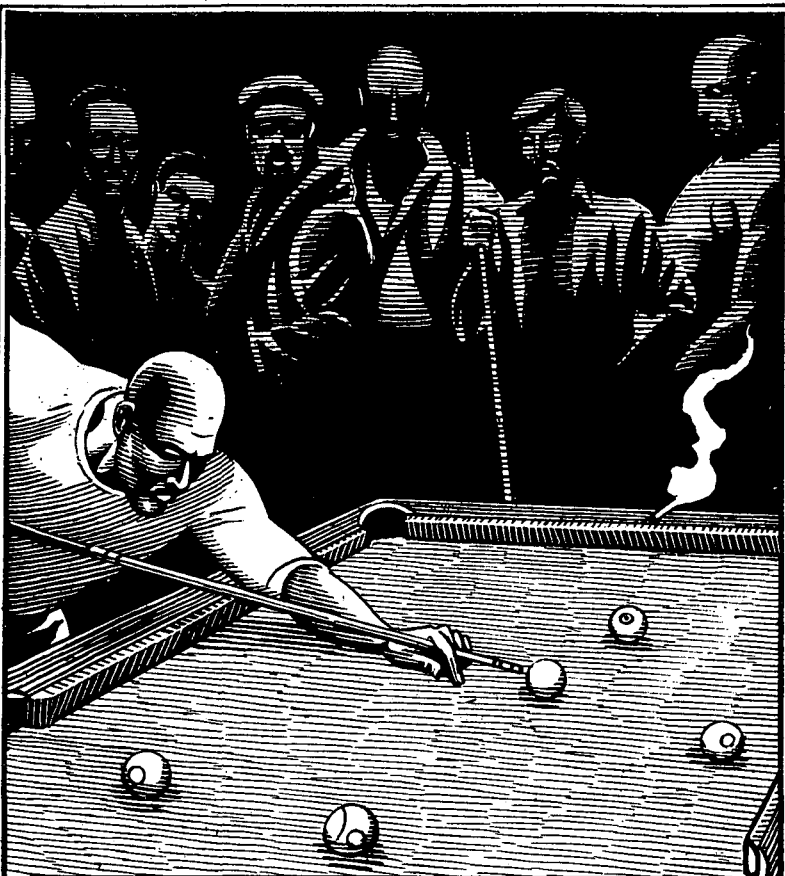
(6) Olive was just below Don and just above the banker. One of the three was the killer.

(7) Bert's apartment was just below that of Maria and just above that of the doctor. One was the victim.

Who killed whom in this sordid affair?

See page 153 for the solution to the May puzzle.

FICTION



BANK SHOT

D. H. Reddall

KRO

The Idle Hour is a real pool hall. It's always dark, even at midday. The only light comes from the battered lamps that hang above each table, throwing cones of light down onto the green felts.

No radio or television distracts the players. There is noise from the street two floors below, filtering up through the dirt-streaked windows; the musical click of the balls; an occasional epithet; the thump of a cue stick on the bare wood floor to applaud a particularly beautiful or difficult shot. Other than that, silence, until around eight in the evening. Then the tables are all in use, and there is the usual mouth music: friendly bickering, guys playing the dozens on each other, an occasional argument.

There is never any violence in the Idle Hour. It's an unwritten rule that serious grievances are settled outside, in the alley. The written rules are posted on a sign above the houseman's desk: "NO GAMBLING, NO DRINKING, NO PROFANITY, NO MASSÉ SHOTS." The sign is old and barely legible, but all the patrons are aware of it and all four injunctions are steadfastly ignored by everyone.

I play several times a week, including Sundays. That's because I drive my mother to church. The church sits adjacent to the Idle Hour, and this is a constant source of irritation to my mother—a pool hall, engaged in the Devil's own work, right next door to Christ's First Presbyterian Church. I deliver her there, shoot a few racks, then drive her home. Invariably she gets in the car, gives me that look, then grabs my left hand and looks between the fingers. Of course she always spots the telltale blue chalk and so knows that a mere twenty feet from the stained-glass windows her son has lingered in Gomorrah, undoing some of her good work.

On this particular Sunday afternoon there were only a few of the regulars playing. Little Jack and Keno were shooting three-cushion billiards and smoking cigars that smelled like burning tires. Ginger and Gable were playing Eight Ball while Alabama, the houseman, was rocked back in his chair, having a snooze.

The kid came in, and he definitely wasn't Idle Hour material. He was wearing a button-down blue Oxford shirt, chinos, the kind with the little buckle in the back that doesn't do anything, a Madras belt, and an honest-to-God pair of white bucks. He was on the short side and as thin as a book on business ethics. He would have been more at home in one of the new "billiard emporiums" that are usually found attached to bowling alleys: family billiards featuring fluorescent lighting, pastel plastiform chairs bolted together ten to a row,

orange or beige felts on the tables—all the atmosphere of a laundromat.

Anyway, the kid clocked in with Alabama and started playing on Table Eleven. There are thirteen tables in all, eleven out front, two in back in a separate alcove. One of them is the three-cushion billiard table. The other is Table One where the serious action takes place.

I watched the kid out of the corner of my eye. He wasn't playing a game or even working on specific shots like most of us do when we have the time. He just scattered the balls haphazardly around the table and proceeded to shoot them off. He didn't show me anything, just another hacker who might run five or six balls before blowing an easy bank.

Gable gave the kid one look and was on him as quick as thought.

"Hey, goodlookin', how about a game, whatchasay?"

Gable's basically a nice guy. He has a winning smile, and there isn't a mean bone in his body. The kid looked him over, shrugged.

"Okay."

"Little Nine Ball? One for the five, five for the nine?" asked Gable, already racking the balls. The kid looked confused.

"Mean to say," Gable continued in that rapid-fire way of talking he has, "whoever sinks the five ball collects a dollar, and five dollars for the nine ball."

"Oh," said the kid. "Well, I guess so. Sure, why not."

"All right!" said Gable and flipped a coin for the break. The kid won and moved to the far end of the table. He sort of swaggered up to position, chalking his cue like he'd been playing for years.

Now Gable, he *has* played for years. Pool, as far as I know, is his main source of income. He's a good player, and Nine Ball is his favorite money game.

The kid stroked the cue badly, making a feeble break. Nothing dropped, and when the balls came to rest, I saw that Gable could easily run them out for a quick six bucks.

Gable's smarter than that. I knew exactly what was going through his mind. Here's a rich kid come to the Idle Hour to see the real action, not that nickel and dime crap like out on the turnpike at the Family Fun Billiards and Bowl-a-Rama. Uh-uh. This here's the real deal, Neil. Down and dirty.

In his own way Gable is a student of psychology. Any good hustler is. So Gable's train of thought would continue along these lines: this kid wants to feel like he's part of the scene. If I blow him off first

game, he'll get discouraged, feel put down. So I'll carry him, lose a few, barely win a few, make him feel like he can carry the weight, and take him for twenty or thirty bucks—no more. This boy's got some deep pockets, that's obvious. He'll go back up to the North Shore and brag to his buddies that he lost thirty bucks at the Idle Hour because the fact that he lost wouldn't hurt him any. His buddies will be impressed that he even had the nerve to go to the Idle Hour, much less gamble.

Most important, Gable would do his best to entertain the kid because if he felt welcome here, why he'd be back, wouldn't he, looking to play a few games with his buddy, Gable. Something like that, you could milk it for weeks, months, who knew? And maybe he'd bring his friends. More sheep to shear.

The thing about Gable is that he would probably end up genuinely liking the guy, providing he didn't turn out to be a jerk.

I watched three games and knew I'd figured it right. Gable lost two games, then narrowly won the third. The kid was loving it. He didn't look nervous any more like he had when he came in. Gable talked him up, told little jokes, and in a stroke of inspiration offered advice now and then on how to approach a shot.

By then it was five o'clock, and my stomach was talking. I woke up Alabama, paid my time, and headed for Burger Master, where I usually have dinner. My mother can't understand it. The Ptomaine Tower she calls it. And I have to laugh because my mother's cooking is *ugly*, Jim. She turns perfectly good meat into something unrecognizable. Vegetables that used to be green and firm come out looking whipped: pale, watery, limp.

Everybody at the Idle Hour has a nickname. Mine is Slim.

I ate, made a few calls, killed some time at the garage where my brother works, and then headed back to the Idle Hour at about eight thirty. I climbed the worn narrow stairs, pushed open the door, and stepped in, taking in the scene for a minute.

I guess you could say that the Idle Hour is my second home, I spend so much time here. Not that I play for money. I don't. I'm not good enough. Nobody even bothers to ask me any more. I just love the game: love to play; love to watch the way the players move into the light, take their shots, drift back into the shadows again; love the way the balls stand out bright and solid against the felt, their shadows shifting around their axes when someone accidentally sets the lamp to swinging.

Most of the players are playing for money, but it's more than that. At their best, on the good nights, they become artists. They have four by eight foot green felt canvases and palettes of sixteen colors, and here in the gloom of the Idle Hour they pursue their work. Within that yellow circle of light they compose fleeting works of art, angular and quick and obsolete as soon as the last ball rolls to a stop. Then they do it again and again, no two shots exactly the same. Kinetic art, ephemeral and, to the interested eye, as beautiful as anything hanging in any gallery.

It was the same this night except for one thing: Table One was in use, and there was a crowd gathered to watch the action. As I walked in, Gable came over, shaking his head.

"'Sapnin' Gable?"

"Slim, you ought to see what that little white dude's up to." He shot me a glance. "No offense, man."

"None taken," I said, laughing. My brother and I are among a small handful of regulars who are white. There's Chalk, of course. Chalk is a tall, gangly, albino guy. He shoots a good game of pool, but he doesn't come in regularly because the fact is he's an incredibly skillful bowler and he spends a lot of time bowling for pink slips—automobile titles. Lot of fools have found themselves walking because they misjudged Chalk.

Anyway, race isn't much of an issue at the Idle Hour. Skill is the issue. Skill and money.

"Little mofo cleaned me out," said Gable in disbelief.

"Hell, Gable, you were giving him instruction when I left."

"Yeah. Well, he's a fast learner. Somehow or other I'm down forty bucks. So I say time to call a halt to *this* nonsense, you know, teach this fool a lesson and to hell with carrying him. I say, 'Let's play a game for the forty,' and he say, 'Let's make it for fifty.'"

"And?"

"Damn if he doesn't do it! He shoots lousy, Slim. Don't hold the stick right, uses an open bridge, crappy english—but he beat me."

We found a spot that afforded us a view of Table One. The kid was moving rapidly around the table, sighting and stroking with confidence. He finished the table, leaving the three ball in good break position, waited for the balls to be racked, and went back to work. Seven balls later he blew a routine cross-table bank. He slammed the butt of his cue on the floor and muttered angrily to himself.

The man who now approached the table was tall and powerfully built. He wore an expensive leather jacket, purple turtleneck, neat-

ly pressed slacks, and his trademark red boots. Maurice, known as 'Reese, one of the best pool players in New England. I've seen him consistently run three and four racks, never seen him lose, rarely heard him speak. He's accorded a great deal of respect in the Idle Hour.

I checked the score. 'Reese had 104, the kid 133, only seventeen short of a win. I was pretty sure, however, that he wouldn't get a chance to shoot again.

'Reese moved gracefully around the table, stroking ball after ball with that soft touch he has; right arm swinging smoothly at the elbow, the stick merely an extension of his arm. Alabama calls him the Oilcan.

"After he wiped me out, he took over a hundred from Willy B. I guess Willy got on the blower to 'Reese because not long after, he shows up, carrying his stick. Little while later they're on Table One shooting straight pool. First game was for fifty. Kid lost by almost thirty balls. Kid don't like losing, Slim. He got mad, say, 'Let's play again.' 'Reese tells him, 'Cost a hundred this time.' Kid don't bat an eye at that."

Twenty minutes later 'Reese sank his forty-sixth straight ball to end the game. He waited, unsmiling, as the kid slapped some wrinkled tens and twenties on the green. He was flushed and clearly angry.

"One more game. Two hundred bucks."

'Reese stared at him for a long minute. He didn't like the kid's manner, didn't appreciate some crewcut private school smartass jabbing fingers at him and making demands.

He stared some more. 'Reese stared at me that way, I'd make sure I was up to date on my health insurance.

"Uuuuuuh-uh!" said Gable. "That little dude got smart too soon, gonna get wise too late."

Finally 'Reese said, "Cost you five hundred."

"Five?" The kid's voice was shrill.

"What I say?" snapped 'Reese, his voice a whip. "Got a problem hearing?"

The kid's jaw muscles bunched and loosened a couple of times. Then he nodded.

"Okay. Five."

'Reese smiled a tight little smile. The balls were racked, and they lagged to see who would break. The kid lost.

The other tables were deserted now. Everybody was watching,

even Little Jack, who rarely left his game of three-cushion billiards. He probably wouldn't have now except that there were so many spectators crammed into the alcove that he had no room to play.

The kid made a classic break. The two rear corner balls left the pack, hit the rails, returned to the pack. Except that there was a little daylight between one of them, the eleven ball, and the rest. It was playable—barely—and if Reese missed, he was in trouble because the cue ball was going to spread the rest of the balls all over the table.

Reese didn't hesitate, just stepped up and drilled it. The eleven rocketed into the corner pocket, and the cue ball drove into the pack, scattering the balls.

I'd seen Reese many an afternoon, when the place was empty, practicing break shots like that one for hours, over and over again, like a musician practicing scales. I'd watched him roll balls the length of the table and shoot them in while they were still moving. Seen him day after day working on banks, cuts, caroms, combinations. When it was time to earn his money, he'd recognize just about any situation on the table because he'd already spent hours analyzing shots just like it, same way a jazz musician can improvise over a familiar tune.

Dinner Bell wandered over, squeezing his three-hundred-odd pounds through the crowd.

"Hey, Slim, Gable. What you think?"

"Think you ought to exercise, D. B., before your heart attacks you," said Gable.

"Aw, man, I do exercise."

"Try this one," said Gable, making a motion in front of him with both hands.

"What's that?"

"Best weight loss exercise there is. Called pushing away the dinner table."

Reese finished the rack, left himself a clean break shot, and started in on the next rack. The kid sat down. He didn't look angry any more. Just watchful.

"That boy's going to be down a nickel before long," said Dinner Bell. "Reese is hot."

Gable shook his head. "Maybe not. That boy's a hustler. Cleaned me and Willy B."

"Won't clean Reese."

Gable smiled. "You know, I almost hope he does. That 'Reese is a mean one. Trouble is, what's he do if he loses?"

"Pays off, just like everyone pays him when he wins, which is all the time."

'Reese broke open another rack and began his methodical march around the table. He was humming a little tune. Never once looked at the kid. All business.

"That's what he *should* do," said Gable. "But right now he's got a problem." We waited for Gable to continue. We knew he would: Gable loves to gossip.

"His little brother Lionel got hurt in a car accident last month. He was riding with a friend, and some fool ran right through a stop sign and hit that car on Lionel's door. He was hurt real bad."

"Damn shame," said Dinner Bell, shaking his head.

"Now, Lionel may be all right again someday, but he's going to need physical therapy, all that stuff, never mind the hospital. There are some big bills to pay."

"Other guy will have to pay," I said.

Gable shook his head. "Other guy's from out of state, and he's uninsured."

"Sue his ass," said Dinner Bell.

"Sure, but this guy was driving a junker. Probably hasn't got any money. Not the kind Lionel's going to need. And 'Reese loves that boy. He's going to care for him the best he can."

We fell silent for a few minutes and watched 'Reese relentlessly sink ball after ball.

It's hard to figure sometimes. With all the dirtbags walking around, a good kid like Lionel gets bagged. I'm sure the pastor next door has an easy answer for it, but I don't.

'Reese finally missed on his forty-first shot. He showed no expression even though he'd left the kid an open table.

The kid got up, flexed his arms a bit, and started shooting. He was cool now, relaxed, his stroke as grooved as 'Reese's. I noticed that he was no longer bridging with an open hand and had complete control over his english, bringing the cue ball to rest in perfect position for the next shot.

It was soon apparent to everyone in the Idle Hour that we were witnessing a rare display of talent. The kid had been holding back before. Now he kicked out the jams, shooting long banks, combinations, caroms—really putting on a show. 'Reese's brow was furrowed. For the first time in many years he was up against it.

Sixty-eight balls later the kid got careless and left himself without a shot. He played a safe but didn't hide the cue ball well enough. Reese surveyed the table from several angles, shot a combination I hadn't ever seen, and was off and running.

"You ever hear of Railroad Red?" asked Gable. We said no.

"He used to come in here back in the forties. Little Jack knew him, you ask him. Man came in dressed like a railroad engineer, always carrying a lantern. No oil in that lantern excepting ignorant oil—whisky, that is. He'd stagger around, challenge guys to a game. They figured he was just a fool, a juicehead who wanted to lose some money. Thing was, he was stone-cold sober, and man, could he shoot pool. Only man to beat him around here was Little Jack."

I said, "I didn't know Little Jack shot pocket billiards."

"Hasn't for awhile now. All the time on that three-cushion table. I never could get the hang of that game. Point is, this little dude here isn't what he'd like us to believe he is. Look how smooth he is. That getting mad was all an act, just sucking Reese in."

Reese reached one hundred twenty-nine and ran into trouble. The cue came to rest frozen against the fifteen ball. There was no shot possible. He looked and looked, then smiled that grim little smile and played a safe, a brilliant shot that tightened up the little group of balls that remained and left the cue ball almost on the rail at one end of the table. Reese shot the kid a triumphant look and stepped back to take a pull on his soda.

The kid put his hands on the edge of the table and surveyed the position. The group of five balls was useless. That left one possibility—the ten ball. It was frozen tight to the rail at the far end, about halfway between the two pockets. A hellish shot. The cue ball would have to strike both the ten ball and the cushion simultaneously and with sufficient force to be successful. Easier than a seven-ten split in bowling, but not by much.

"Ten in the corner," said the kid, pointing with his stick.

Reese smiled. A dozen experienced players shook their heads as the kid lined it up and fired.

It was a perfect shot. The ten squirted along the rail and dropped. The cue hit two more cushions and broke open the remaining balls.

Cue sticks thumped the floor in appreciation. Voices called praise and encouragement. The kid grinned and went back to work. Reese had to stand and watch as the kid ran out the game—eighty-two straight balls. I'd never seen a display of nerve and skill to match it.

The kid laid his stick on the table and looked over at 'Reese, not gloating but just seeming to say, hell of a game, huh?

'Reese looked like he'd been hit by a bus.

The kid unscrewed his stick and put it away, sort of giving 'Reese a little time to recover. People started to drift away. It wasn't likely that 'Reese would ask for another game. Finally he put on his jacket and stood by the table, waiting.

"I believe you owe me five," he said gently.

'Reese looked up at the kid and shook his head. For a second the kid didn't understand. Then he realized that 'Reese wasn't going to pay up.

"Hey, Jim, that's not right," he said, still not raising his voice. Nevertheless, everyone heard it and stopped to see what was going down.

"When I lost, I paid the cost. Now you do the right thing here."

"No," said 'Reese. His face was screwed up tight. He glared at the kid. "I need this money, see? I *need* it!"

"Come on, 'Reese, pay the man," said Keno.

"You *shut up*, man!" barked 'Reese. "Ain't none of your goddamn business."

"Not right, 'Reese," someone called.

"Pay your bill, man," said another.

'Reese stood resolute, scowling at the room. Alabama eased up to the table.

"What's the problem, gentlemen?"

"No problem," said 'Reese. "Go back to sleep."

This was a tactical error on 'Reese's part. Alabama is the man at the Idle Hour, and as such he holds the hammer.

"Seems to me," he said, "that you might be looking for another place to shoot pool."

Now 'Reese heard that, and it was as close to a threat as anyone would dare make. He depended on the Idle Hour. It was where he practiced and where he derived a fair amount of his income from the fish who wandered in and got hooked.

He looked around the room and found no encouragement in that wall of faces. He turned back to Alabama, who very quietly said, "Pay the man, 'Reese. It was a fair game."

'Reese reached into his pocket, counted out the five hundred, which was most of what he had, and tossed it on the table. Then he turned on his heel and slammed out into the night.

The kid shot Alabama a grateful look and gathered up the bills. A

few minutes later he too was gone, leaving us to buzz about 'Reese's ungracious behavior and the best pool most of us had ever seen.

I didn't get back to the Idle Hour for a couple of days. When I did, Gable hustled right over.

"You hear what happened to that little fellow who cleaned 'Reese? No? Oh, man, they found him in the park, same night. Someone laid a beating on him. Took his money, too." Gable lowered his voice.

"You know old Harley, always hangs out in the park? He saw the whole thing. It was 'Reese. He beat the kid's butt something terrible."

"Cops?"

"Uh-uh. Harley's afraid to speak up. Kid told him he didn't want cops anyway. Harley helped him to his car, and he drove off."

I looked around the room. It was crowded with the regulars, looking for action or just jawing. I knew most of them, not intimately, but well enough to know that almost every one of them would be appalled by what 'Reese had done.

Just then the man himself appeared, carrying his stick, resplendent in yellow turtleneck, black pants, red boots. He took an empty table and began screwing the two halves of his stick together.

A voice rang out from the rear of the Idle Hour.

"Maurice!"

Every head turned toward the owner of the voice: Little Jack. He stood by Table One, stick in hand.

"What you want?" said 'Reese, spreading balls around the table.

"I want a game. One hundred and twenty-five balls of straight pool. Tournament rules. Alabama holds the money and acts as referee."

'Reese looked amused, then confused. Finally he said, "How much, old man?"

"Five hundred. One game for five hundred."

'Reese laughed. "Lucky for you I don't have that much on me." He turned to the table and chalked his cue.

"Then go and get it," said Little Jack in a voice edged with steel.

'Reese whirled around. "Hey, old man! Who you shouting orders at? I'm busy here, got no time to be giving pool lessons to hasbeens."

There wasn't a sound in the room. Heads turned from Little Jack to 'Reese and back to Little Jack.

"That's funny," said the old man, addressing the rest of us. "Man's

got a mouth, no ears. Hey, fool! I said I'm offering you five hundred dollars for a pool lesson if you're good enough to earn it."

Reese considered the old man. He was clearly angry at being spoken to so rudely, but he was also wary. Little Jack is well liked by everybody in the Idle Hour. Furthermore, he was an unknown quantity: none of us had ever seen him play anything but three-cushion billiards.

Reese nodded. "I'll take your five hundred. Maybe give you a lesson in manners, too."

There was an immediate stampede for Table One. Little Jack removed his brown Borsalino and brown pinstriped jacket. Alabama stored them neatly behind the counter and counted the money Little Jack handed him.

"Five hundred," he said to Reese.

Without a word Reese placed his money on the desk. The balls were racked, and both men approached the table for the lag.

"Referee?" said Reese.

"There's rules," said Little Jack, dusting his hands with talcum powder. "Got to play according to the rules, Maurice."

They lagged. Little Jack won. Reese broke the rack.

It was his last shot.

A little over an hour and a half later Little Jack straightened up from the table as the four ball disappeared into the side pocket. Silently he unscrewed his stick.

The room broke into wild applause. Reese stood stunned and ignored, staring at the remaining balls as if seeking in their random configuration a reason for what had just befallen him.

One hundred twenty-five straight balls by a man to whom most of us paid scant attention other than as a relic who had been in the Idle Hour since time out of mind, and who devoted his hours to a game that consisted of three balls and a table with no pockets.

Nobody said a word to Reese, who put away his stick and walked quietly out the door.

Gradually the room returned to normal. I walked over to the desk.

"Alabama. What gives?"

Alabama smiled. "You saw it."

"But I don't believe it."

"Neither does Reese." His smile broadened. "He should pay a little more attention to history."

"Railroad Red?"

"Oh yeah. Railroad Red and a lot of other excellent players as

well. Back in the early fifties Little Jack was one of the best. Played in the Midwest and on the Coast, mostly. But I heard about the time he played Willie Mosconi in an exhibition in New York. They say he gave Mosconi fits; almost beat him.

"This was when Willie was at the top of his form, remember. He wiped out Jimmy Moore in 1956 in one inning—one hundred fifty straight balls. Couple of years before that he sank over five hundred balls in a row in another exhibition. So you can imagine how strong a player Little Jack was, even though he was quite young."

"Still is strong," I said.

"Well," said Alabama with a wink, "he comes here to play three-cushion, but he has a regular table at home."

"A few more games like that," I said, "and he can buy a billiard table."

Alabama reached in the drawer and showed me an envelope.

"Reese's five hundred." He replaced the envelope and tilted his chair back in preparation for a nap. "We'll put the word out. A kid that good won't be hard to locate."

I left then, feeling pretty good about my fellow man, leaving Alabama rocked back in his chair, dozing, until someone calls "Rack!" disturbing his non-Euclidean dreams.

For back issues, send your check for \$5.00 (U.S. funds) to Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, Suite 1500, 251 Main Street, Stamford, CT 06901-2988. Please specify the issue you are ordering. Add \$2.00 per copy for delivery outside the U.S.



McGuffy's House

Mike Owens

“I never heard of such a thing,” Santucci said, handling the invitation roughly, fingernailing the corner into a limp wedge. “Sixth grade reunion,” he snorted.

“I’ve got some time coming,” I said. “And they’re tearing down my school.”

“Oh hell.” Frank tossed the piece of cardboard at me. “Take a week. Take two weeks.”

I picked up the invitation. “Just a week, Frank.”

On the plane I remembered things: Susan and Cecil and Jimmy, my tree-climbing partner. Every Saturday we’d go down to the river and pick a tree to climb. Jimmy was quick and fearless. I’d climb to the wrist-thick branches, but Jimmy would go beyond that, up to where the sun would gleam from his yellow hair. Miss Marsh taught third grade. Not a kid in town didn’t love Miss Marsh.

I rented a car at the airport and drove “home,” my heart beating faster as I got closer. I rehearsed what I’d say to the people now living there, something that would get me inside for a quick look, and then I rolled to a stop at a vacant lot.

The trees and neat brick houses that had lined Chestnut Street were gone. The houses that once protected Jimmy and

Susan and Cecil were gone. My house was gone. My sense of loss surprised me. It had been over forty years, and I’d rarely thought about it. I could hear the river in the distance.

I drove to the motel through the approaching night.

“Tom Curtis.”

I’d looked at the name on the invitation without recognizing it. Now I remembered; he’d lived next door. “Hello?” he said.

“Nick Anderson,” I told him.

“Ah,” he said. “Nick.”

I jogged his memory. “I came for the reunion, Tom.”

“Ah. Yes,” he said.

We sat in silence at our respective phones. Then Tom said, “As a matter of fact, Nick, no one wanted to come.”

“Oh,” I said, sitting on a ratty bed cover in a cheap motel.

“Well, everyone’s still here. You’re the only one that left town.” He was silent for a minute. “Okay. Three or four others. But they’re either dead or can’t be found.”

“Tommy, Tommy, Tommy,” I said.

“Now, take it easy. It’s understandable—no one wanted to get together with people they see every day.”

“Sure,” I said. “I understand. And this was such a sudden decision you couldn’t tell me it



was off before I caught a plane to Podunk."

"The trip's not wasted. I know what you do. I want to hire you. Really."

It took me a minute to make the transition, but I had a week and nothing to lose. "I had to get here," I reminded him.

He hesitated but only for a second. "No problem. I'll pick up the airfare."

I pushed my luck. "I have to get around, Tom." Another beat and he agreed to pay for the car. I felt better. Tom wasn't getting Santucci Investigations; he was getting a Santucci legman. He didn't know any better, he deserved it, and how tough could a case be in a town this size?

We agreed to meet the next morning. I hung up and sat for a minute wondering why Tom sounded as though he'd been coached.

Tom had not aged well. Gravity had stretched both face and stomach. Poached eyes swam behind thick, drooping lenses, and he looked about to cry.

We sat in his office, part of a real estate franchise. A Leroy Neiman reproduction hung askew on the wall, revealing an open safe.

"Do you remember McGuffy?" he wheezed, his forward-leaning bulk pushing an aromatic cloud of cologne in my direction.

McGuffy had sat in his house on Collins Street rapping angrily on the window when kids entered his front yard. He made things. Chicken wire, pipes, and pulleys rusted in his yard. Block and tackle dangled from the eaves. Adults knew him as a brilliant inventor with a few eccentricities. To us kids he was only a mean little man.

"I remember him," I said, wondering why McGuffy should be an inspiration for talk of old times.

"Do you remember the day we went into his house? You and me sneaking in to see what your dad and mine were doing there?"

McGuffy had died. Sitting in his chair behind the curtain, a heart attack. The smell finally notified the dogs, then the nearest neighbor. My father and Tom's, in their official capacities of doctor and cop, had gone in through the back door to avoid alerting the curious, and we'd followed, unnoticed. It was late August. By September I was gone, and shortly after that both of my parents died in a car crash and I hadn't thought of any of it in a long time.

"I remember," I said.

Tom peered at me as though seeking something in my expression, then he leaned back in his chair. I thought he looked disappointed. "Okay," he said.

~~~~~  
We sat for a minute; he asked about my folks and I told him and we sat some more. Finally he slapped his hands down on the arms of the chair, pushing himself up. He walked over to the wall safe, opened the door, and removed something that he placed on the desk in front of me. A gold ingot.

"My dad's in a rest home now," he said, looking down at the golden bar. I remembered his father. A big, arrogant man with a swagger, a loud voice, and a son who never quite measured up. That son aligned the ingot with the edge of the desk. "He's a vegetable. A stupid old man." He looked out the window, then shook his head and slapped his hands together. "Here's the deal. McGuffy's house. I can't sell it."

I bit. "Why?"

"You'll see when I show you the house. Twice I've sold it, and twice it's come back. Treasure hunters. They're out there digging at night. The owners wake to find fresh holes in the yard."

Rumor had it that McGuffy was protecting a fortune. Otherwise, why spend so much time warning people off? Gold, people said. A fortune in gold. But that was forty years ago, and I said as much.

"I know, I know. It's not steady. Things are quiet for awhile, maybe years. Then the

old rumors surface, and the digging starts again."

I touched the ingot. It was cold and smooth. "This is going to be the treasure?"

Tom nodded. "There are two of them. People know McGuffy did his own foundry work. Had that little furnace in the back yard. You spend the week looking around. I tell people what you're doing. You don't have to do much, just go through the motions and come up with the ingots. The treasure's found, people stop looking. I sell the house. I'll pay you, say, fifty bucks a day."

I shook my head. "Two hundred a day and expenses."

Tom sat for a minute, caressing the smooth golden bar. "One fifty," he said. I shrugged my acceptance.

"Okay," he said slapping his hands down on the desktop, punctuating our deal. "Let's go to the house."

"I know where it is."

"Well, I should—"

"I work alone, Tom," I said.

His turn to shrug. He got up and replaced the ingot in the safe.

"Why two ingots?" I asked.

He flipped the dial and repositioned the picture over the vault. "Psychology," he said, tapping his forehead. "One ingot's not a treasure. One sug-



gests there's another. Two makes it feel like you got it all."

It sounded clever to me. I didn't think of Tom as clever.

Another street had been added since my time, and it let me meander a mile out of my way before I pulled up in front of the house. I sat there for a minute just looking; then I left the car and pushed open the gate. It moved silently, testament after all this time to McGuffy's mechanical genius. The yard was pocked with holes. The older ones had been filled, but it had gotten to be too big a job, judging from the pits that had been left. There was hardly a patch left worth digging in. I wandered around to the back and found the same scabbed yardwork. I could understand Tom's problem. I'd not want to wake at night to the sound of shovels slicing into my lawn.

A car horn blasted from the front of the house. On the second hoot, I went to look. It was Tom.

"I figured you'd be here by now," he said. "Look, I got this great idea. You, me, Cecil, and Jimmy. The old gang, the old neighborhood. Susan. I'll call her, too. We'll get together. Have dinner on me. Have a reunion. Okay?"

"Okay," I said.

"Great!" He put the car in

gear. "Luigi's. Six o'clock." The car slid away from the curb. I watched him out of sight, feeling he'd been out front for some time. Perhaps he was making sure he got a good return on his investment.

I turned back to the house. I didn't want to go inside, so I mooched about in the yard until midafternoon, then took a rest from my investigative labors and toured the town.

Beyond the impact of industry and development, things looked the same. Farms and ranches. Even the Happy Trails Dude Ranch was still there. All us "townies" had learned to ride at Happy Trails.

The afternoon was gone by the time I finished. I drove back to the motel, showered, changed into a fresh shirt, and set out to find Luigi's. I felt as nervous as when I had driven out to Chestnut Street, and I found myself worrying that no one would be there. That, like my house, they would be missing.

They were there. All of them. We ate, drank wine, and caught up. Cecil ran the local branch of the county library, and Jimmy taught at the high school. Susan's husband had died a few years back, leaving her a considerable inheritance. "I'm a do-gooder," she said. "I saved the library, and now I'm working on

~~~~~  
the school." She thought for a minute. "I'm a rehabilitator."

Tom explained what I'd be doing in such a way as to make me wonder if he suspected someone at the table. When he was done, Cecil leaned over to whisper that in his opinion Tom was the treasure hunter.

"Tom?"

"He's been a nut about the McGuffy house since he was a kid."

"Why does he have to keep taking it back?"

"What?"

"People buy it; can't take the digging. The realtor buys it back?"

Cecil stared at me, then shook his head. "Tom owns the house. He's never sold it to anyone."

"He wants me to investigate his own nocturnal activities and put a stop to them?"

Cecil leaned forward, elbows on the table. "Tom always was odd," he said. Having made his point he leaned back to say something to Susan.

We finally reached that point old acquaintances come to when updates are over and common bonds have therefore disappeared. Our conversation faltered and then stopped entirely. I looked around the table. Cecil, dark and lean as a kid, had a portly, professorial look. Jimmy was a long way from the golden treeclimber. I looked into one of the wall mirrors and realized

that I too had long since climbed my last tree. Susan, however, still had the same green eyes in a round, smooth face. The quick smile was still sweet and dimpled, and with some surprise I realized she was beautiful now and had been then.

The silence grew until Tom stood. "A toast," he said. "To us."

We dutifully raised and clinked, and Tom, still standing, said, "Let's go home."

Surprised by the abrupt end to the evening, no one spoke. Tom looked around the table, puzzled by the silence. "Chestnut Street," he said. "You know. Home."

"But it's gone, Tom," Susan said. "There's nothing left."

"The land's there. We know where the houses stood. Come on!" He waved his arms, sloshing his drink. "It's a reunion! Nick's here! Let's go home one more time!"

The soft evening's dark hid the sore spots on the land, and honeysuckle sweetened the air. The river murmured in the distance.

"I was here," said Tom, moving off the sidewalk onto the dirt. "I'm in the living room." He pantomimed the opening of a door and stepped forth onto the "porch." "Nick," he said, "can you play?"

I was alone. The others had



gone "home." I could see them in a shadowy line down the street. I stepped up on the curb, where a tree once shaded the walk. A porch had extended the whole length of the house, and open windows let the summer breeze fill thin white curtains.

From my left came a plaintive "Nick?" I could feel all the eyes, willing me to answer. "Hey, Tom," I said.

"Nick?" Susan's soft voice in the dark.

"Hey, Susan."

They came out of the dark, converging on me. We stood in a circle, and then, for a moment, I didn't know these people. It was as though the disappearance of my home had sucked from my brain that piece that held the children of my childhood.

Lacking anything else to do, I sat down on the curb, and the others joined me.

"Remember the candy?" asked Jimmy. His father had worked for a company that made wafers packed in a cellophane tube. If one of the tubes broke, he'd toss it into an empty room for disposal later on. Jimmy and I would recline, heads pillowed in candy wafers, reading comic books.

"I liked brown," I said. "You always went for licorice."

"Remember when Susan told us we couldn't play together any more?" asked Cecil. "We were

playing catch. Right here in front of Nick's house."

I remembered. "You had on a dress."

"We'd not seen that before," said Jimmy.

"You sat on the porch swing. You wouldn't play catch with us."

Susan's shape shifted in the nostalgic dark. Her face was a faint, pale oval. "I said I was a woman and you boys wouldn't understand." We were sixth graders and our relationships suddenly changed, for Susan had moved to a place we couldn't follow. She had become mysterious and we'd fallen in love, and that subtle change colored what was left of our childhoods without our even knowing it.

"Mickey Hagerty," said Jimmy, breaking the silence.

"Oh yes!" said Susan.

Hagerty was in the eighth grade to our sixth. He liked to hang around talking to the sixth grade girls. He smoked. He drank. He was mean, tough, and had done it. An exciting boy.

"Geez!" Cecil drew a deep breath. "The things you remember."

"I remember Miss Marsh," I said. Tom's voice, for the first time, came suddenly out of the dark. "Then Mother would call me." His voice floated up to a higher register. "Thomas," he



sang. He stood. "Gotta go." He disappeared into the dark, and his disembodied voice asked, "You guys remember this?," then played a scene from forty years back.

"Where *were* you!" He had her voice down cold.

"At Nick's, Mom. Just next door." The back of my neck prickled.

"Don't lie to me!"

"Honest!"

"I looked for you at Nick's." Silence. "Come here. Don't you flinch; don't you *dare* flinch!" The sound of a slap came sharp and clear. I heard Susan take a startled breath. Cecil asked Tom what he was up to and got no response. The night turned cold, and I started to shiver.

The shrill voice went on. "Stop trying to look through my nightgown!"

"I'm not!"

"Liar! Pervert!" Another slap.

I stood. Our homecoming was over. The others stood with me. "Tom," I called. "Let's go."

He came to meet us at the curb, rubbing his hands briskly together. His eyes glittered, and he smelled of sweat. "All right!" he said. "The night's young. Where to, gang?"

We made excuses, which didn't seem to bother him. "Okay!" He slapped me on the back. "Get some sleep, Nick. Gotta hard

day ahead of you." He gave me an exaggerated wink.

Driving back to the motel, I suddenly realized that nobody had mentioned the aborted reunion. I also realized that Tom was a certifiable looney.

That night I dreamt I stood on the sidewalk in front of my house. A great gate towered over me, but that was wrong, for my house had no fence. I pushed, and the massive thing swung silently open. My house stood before me, its curtains foaming from the front windows. Somebody was sitting in the porch swing, and I realized it was dark because I couldn't tell who sat there.

I climbed the steps to the porch and heard something tap and scrabble across the glass. A voice from the swing said, "You can't follow," and I was at the back of McGuffy's house, slipping inside through the open door.

My father was there. He and McGuffy stood talking together. I was going to say something to him, but Tom's father stepped in front of me, clipping his fingernails. He clipped his thumb-nail, and it twanged coldly in the silence of the room. My father said something, but I was in a box of some sort and couldn't hear.

The empty swing creaked while footsteps crossed the



porch. Now the dark threatened, and I reached for the light switch. I flicked it down; no light came on, and someone grasped my hand.

I woke. My heart was whanging away, trying to get out. As it slowed, I drifted down into sleep again, remembering the voice of my father and remembering that McGuffy had been standing.

I got up the next morning to a day full of sun. I decided McGuffy could wait and drove down to the river where the trees were still plentiful and the water still flowed brown and wide. We'd vacationed once a couple of hundred miles to the north where the river came out of the mountains clear and green, roaring between great chunks of granite. It was like memory, that forward rush to the ocean, the past ultimately recycled in the raindrops falling again into the green source. It was also a line of demarcation. On this side was my childhood with my parents, and on the other side was my life without my parents. The one side seemed bright and clear and the other vague up to the time I simply got used to it.

I sat and watched the wind move the trees, which had no climbers in them. I listened to the river and remembered the

green water until the sun moved directly overhead.

I drove back to the motel, where a message from Susan suggested lunch.

I weighed that against McGuffy's treasure and decided on Susan. The thought that her green gaze might look favorably on me across the years came unbidden.

She'd chosen a deli. Bright, cheerful, good sandwiches. We were well into them when she did fix her green eyes on mine. "How long have you been a detective, Nick?" It had been an errant thought. I didn't really expect anything to kindle.

"I'm not, really," I said. "Not a detective. I work for one. Santucci, Frank Santucci."

She said nothing. I offered more. "I'm what Santucci calls a stringer. I go out and look at things, and then I give Frank a report. I do well at looking; not so well at detecting. Santucci puts it together."

"And you do all this looking out of Whitefork?" she asked. Intent on myself, I missed it, and she went quickly on: "But you *are* detecting for Tom."

"Yes. Well . . ."

"The treasure's not it, you know."

"He doesn't want me to find it?"

She waved one hand, dismissing McGuffy's gold. "They're not

~~~~~  
real, those ingots. Tom wants you to find his sixth grade. He's lost it. The McGuffy house has something to do with it, and the treasure's just to keep you poking around." She wiped her lips with her napkin and folded it beside her plate. "That scene last night. He was telling you about it."

"I thought he was telling me he's bonkers," I said.

She shook her head. "No. He wants your help. He doesn't want to ask because he doesn't want to admit he's got a problem."

"What makes you think he lost the sixth grade?"

"He told me. Sort of. He wanted to know if I'd noticed a difference in his mother during that year. He said she seemed different after she fell off her horse." She looked at me expectantly. I didn't get it. "She didn't have a horse, Nick. Look at those lots. You see room for a horse?"

"Maybe boarded at a ranch somewhere?" I thought of Happy Trails.

She shook her head. "No. I told him she had no horse; never had a horse. He wouldn't believe me. Something changed her, and he can't remember what. It happened in the sixth grade, and he's convinced it was the fall from her horse that did it."

"And you think he wants me to find out."

"I know he wants you to."

I thought about it for a minute. "You know, there *was* something different."

She leaned forward, beating me to it. "The nightgown. Tom the pervert."

We'd always heard what Mrs. Curtis had to say because she made no effort to prevent it. But we'd never heard her accuse Tom in such a manner. I had no idea what it meant. Susan looked at me in a manner that implied I should find out.

"I'll look around," I said.

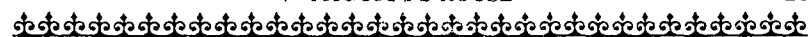
"Good," she said. "I'll be your Santucci."

Now I recalled her previous remark. The night before, I'd said I lived in Seattle. It was easier than trying to explain the location of Whitefork. "Whitefork and fake ingots," I said as mildly as I could. "You must have helped Tom with his reunion plans."

She looked down at her plate. "He needs help. I figured an old friend would be best. And it's still a kind of reunion."

I let the "old friend" go by. "How'd you find me?"

"By accident. The paper wanted to do a 'where are they' feature for the bicentennial, and they came to me to set things up. I put a researcher at the library to work on it, and there you were, in Whitefork, 'looking' for a detective named Santucci."



It seemed fated. Tom needed an investigator. All I had to do was to get you here."

We sat without saying anything for a minute. "Well, I'd better start," I said.

"Good," she said again.

A good detective checks out all the possibilities, so I drove out to the Happy Trails Ranch. A skinny little wrangler pointed me to the office. Leona Curtis had never owned one of their horses. Nobody by that name had ever even had lessons there.

I stepped out of the office and stood for a minute trying to decide on my next move. The same skinny wrangler had just saddled one of the horses for a customer. I walked over to the fence and watched her clamber aboard. The leather of the saddle complained under her weight and then groaned as she settled herself in. The horse blew a raspberry, shook itself, and off they went in a melody of plodding hoof and creaking leather.

I made another trip to McGuffy's house. This time I went inside.

As McGuffy had done for all those years, I looked out the window he'd guarded. I could see the walk, the gate, the house across the street, and Tom. He was in his car, and when he saw

me, he put it in gear and pulled away.

I looked around the empty room. Something creaked as the sun warmed the walls that held in the cold. I went into the dining room and stood behind the door, looking through the crack at where McGuffy had sat. This was where Tom and I had huddled. I crouched down to get the boy's perspective. It felt claustrophobic, the wall to one side, the back of the door to the other, my only view through the crack, as though I were in a box. I could see the front window and the place where McGuffy had sat. I remembered last night's dream: McGuffy had been standing. A kid had come up the walk to peer in at that front window. I heard a stealthy footstep on the other side of the door; McGuffy coming for me.

I stood quickly and stepped from the enclosure. The room was empty, and beyond the dining room window, the day was still and quiet.

I went down to the basement. Piles of pipe rusted against the far wall. Coils of wire hung from nails. Various molds for the shaping of metal were stacked in a corner. I was standing in a time capsule. Forty years ago McGuffy had used these things, and they were still here, filling the air with the smell of cold metal and rust. I climbed back



up the stairs and stood in the living room again. McGuffy had died of a heart attack. Why would he have been standing?

I left the house and was surprised to see the sun still shining. I figured I'd spend some time looking for Tom's sixth grade. Those ghosts might have a lighter step.

At the school, the hardhats wouldn't let me past the scaffolding. I remembered Susan's involvement and called her. When she arrived, we were, with great respect, handed a couple of hats and given access to the building.

We stood in front of the display case. I could see our reflections and, eventually, Tom's. He was just outside the door, being casual. A grown man taking his ease on the steps of an elementary school. I wanted to laugh, but I saw Miss Marsh's name on the memorial plaque and the shock of it there made me take an involuntary breath.

"What is it?" asked Susan.

"Miss Marsh died." My voice echoed in the empty hall. "She's dead."

Tom's reflection suddenly loomed between ours. He peered at the plaque, then turned to Susan as though to say something. He was shivering. "Tom?" she asked. He shook his head and turned away from us. He

hurried to his car and stood there for a moment, fumbling for the keys. He opened the car door, then shut it. He looked at us, mouth open as though about to shout. Then he left the car and walked down the street.

Susan turned back to the display. "Just before the seventh grade," she said. "September. You'd already moved away."

"What?"

"The year she died. We never really talked about it. It was so horrible."

"What?" I asked again. "What was horrible?"

She looked down the street in the direction Tom had gone. "She was murdered." She turned to stare into the display case again. Something lurched in the vicinity of my heart, and I waited for her to go on. "I felt so angry. She'd been so *alive*, so beautiful. We all loved her so much." She touched my arm. "Tom saw something. In the sixth grade. Miss Marsh and Mr. Curtis, do you think?"

I shook my head. "No. She'd never have anything to do with an ape like Curtis."

"Mrs. Curtis died, too. Tom was terribly broken up by it. I remember him crying, even in the classroom."

"When did she die?"

She thought. "I'm not sure. We could find out."

\*



Knowing the local librarian as well as the local "do-gooder" was handy. Under Cecil's direction, the entire library staff rushed to make us comfortable, supplying us with coffee, the best fiche reader, and the files we needed.

Miss Marsh had been the victim of a brutal mugging. I stared at the fuzzy microfiche. The date put it a couple of weeks after Tom and I were in McGuffy's house. Gentle and beautiful. Miss Marsh had been beaten to death.

Mrs. Curtis had died within weeks of Miss Marsh. A car accident. Hit and run. Susan saw it before I did: two women in the same small town in the same year. Neither case had ever been solved.

"It has to do with that," she said. "It has to do with his mother's death and the killing of Miss Marsh." She thought for a minute. "His father's a cop."

"Was a cop," I said.

I dropped Susan off and drove back to the motel. No sign of Tom, but I had a message: I should call Mickey Hagerty. The things you remember.

Hagerty lived in the next town over, some thirty miles away. By the time I got to our meeting place he was several beers into pugnacity. He'd come a long way from teen idol, for hard living had rasped at him till everything was soiled, and he smelled

stale. He hunched on the other side of the table, holding onto a mug of beer while he squinted against cigarette smoke and challenged me. "I know why you're nosing around, and you ain't pinning any damn murder on me!" He took a swallow of beer. "No, sir!"

"Mickey," I said. "What are you talking about?"

"Private eye, huh! Hotshot private eye coming down here, pin a murder on Mickey Hagerty. No, sir! You got another think comin'!"

"What murder?"

Hagerty put his glass down on the table. "What murder," he said to an unseen audience. He leaned forward to whisper, "McGuffy. It's why you're in his house, ain't it?"

"No."

"Oh sure," said Hagerty. "Look, he was dead. I didn't kill him. He was just sitting there staring at the far wall. Stone cold. In his harness."

"What harness?"

"He must of rigged it when he thought he was starting to lose it. You know, getting too old. But still mean, still having to scare off the kiddies. He'd rigged himself a way of getting out of the chair. All the pulleys and tackle." He gestured vaguely at the ceiling. "Then someone came up the walk. Tripped some kind of switch." He stopped.



I remembered the kid at the front of the house, as terrified as Tom and I by the stiffened arm pushing the curtain aside while the glaring eyes in the twisted face turned on him. The dead man's harness had creaked and groaned as the thick pieces of leather strained to haul his weight out of the chair. I'd forgotten what was once a child's moment of terror, and I was pretty sure Tom had forgotten it as well, along with everything that came after. Tom's father had cut him down. I remembered the sound. Not a thumb-nail but a wire, singing off down some secret trail.

Hagerty was still talking. "I figured I had my week. No one was going to know. No one was going to come in while McGuffy was there, and McGuffy was there every time someone came up the walk." He laughed.

"Did you find it?"

Hagerty shook his head.

"Why'd you think it was inside? McGuffy's concern was with the front yard."

Hagerty looked hurt. "Damn!" he said. "Is it found?"

"No," I said, thinking of the pot-holed lawn. "But not for lack of trying."

I got back to the motel without a sign of Tom. I sat on the bed and considered McGuffy's harness. At Happy Trails the

leather saddles creaked when they moved. Tom said his mother fell from a horse. I thought about calling it a night, and then I thought about spending another day here. I phoned Tom.

"Tom Curtis."

"Tom, it's Nick."

"Ah. Nick."

Déjà vu. "Nick Anderson."

"Right. Sure." I could picture him briskly washing his hands together, phone up to the ear on one hunched shoulder. "So. Time to announce the 'discovery,' eh?"

"Tom—"

"Where do you want to find 'em? Stop by, I'll give them to you. I trust you. You'll do right by me." His voice kept rising, and the words were coming faster and faster.

"Tom," I said. "I remembered something."

It stopped him.

"Tom?"

"Yes. Right. You remembered."

"About McGuffy's house. Should we get together?"

"Sure. Well, I'm pretty busy. But lemme look." I heard pages flipped. "Yeah! As it happens, I'm free right now. Ain't that a coincidence! Luigi's. In the lounge, about an hour." He hung up.

I thought some more and then called Susan.



They were both there when I arrived. I sat down across from them and shook my head at the approaching waitress. Tom took a deep, trembling swallow of his drink and put the glass back on the table. "So," he said. "You remembered."

"Yes. That afternoon. You and me behind the dining room door. Somebody came up the sidewalk." I stopped. Tom looked blank. "You don't remember, do you?"

He shook his head. "No," he said. "I don't."

"McGuffy stood," I said. "Old dead McGuffy stood. He had a harness. Somewhere along the sidewalk, a kid triggered a counterbalance. It pulled him out of the chair, and his harness creaked and groaned like the leather on a saddle."

Tom stared down at his drink.

Susan picked up on it. "A saddle on a horse, Tom."

He didn't move.

She tugged at his sleeve, insisting he remember. "The horse your mother fell from."

His eyes swam up to meet mine. "Oh," he said as some memory flowed through the old crusted brainpaths he'd shut down so long ago. His mouth opened and closed a few times until he managed to get his vocal cords working. "She was at the window. She'd pushed the curtain open. Just like McGuffy.

And she was bent at the waist, like McGuffy, looking out of the window right at me." Tom licked his lips and took another swallow of his drink. "All caved in at the waist, skinny and bent, just like McGuffy."

He finished his drink and put the empty glass back on the table. "I was in the back yard. Midday. I don't know why I was home." He shook his head as though puzzled. "There *wasn't* any nightgown." He stared down at the table. "Miss Marsh was there."

Susan took a deep breath and let it out in a sigh. "In your house?"

"Yes. The curtains were open. My mother held them. She was looking at me. Miss Marsh looked . . . sad." He stared off into the distance. "Maybe she was telling Mom something about school. Maybe that's why I was home."

"You were in the sixth grade, Tom. Miss Marsh taught third."

"Right. Right, I'd forgotten. Couldn't of been that." He pushed his empty glass away and gave me a grotesque smile. "Well, Nick, I guess the treasure's found. Thanks. Couldn't have done it without your help. Glad you came along."

Susan insisted, "Tom, did your mother fall from the horse after you saw her at the window?"

He ignored her and brought





out his wallet. "Okay. Payoff time. Cash okay?" He handed me five hundred dollar bills. "Two days and a little extra. Send the bill for air and car. I'll take care of it."

He replaced his wallet and stood. I stood with him and took the proffered hand.

Susan reached up to take him by the arm. "Did you tell your father?" He tried to move, but she had a deathgrip on him. "Did you?" she hissed. His eyes suddenly filled with tears, and she let him go.

I stood there after he'd gone. The back of the house. Two bedrooms and bath between. Just like my house. "They were in the bedroom," Susan said. "The first time he mentioned his mother's horse he said 'they.' " She reached into her purse and pulled out her checkbook. I watched while she wrote my name and put down a five and two zeros. She snapped it from the book and handed it to me. "My share," she said.

I took it and laid it on top of Tom's cash. "More than reunion invitations," I said.

"Yes," she said. "We were in here. Some real estate deal he needed money for. We got to talking about the old days, and he told me about his mother's fall. But he said 'they.' That one time he said, 'They' fell from the horse."

"How'd you put it together?"

"I didn't. Not until now. But about a year ago I realized that Tom never talked about Miss Marsh." I remembered that night at "home" when I said her name. "It wasn't that he wouldn't; it was just that he'd somehow change the subject."

"So the 'old friend' was called to help Susan, not Tom," I said.

"I wanted her killer. And I wanted to keep it in the family, so to speak."

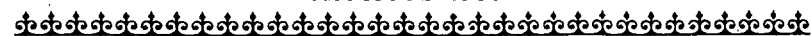
I waited.

"The only cop on the case never solved either killing. His son told him what he'd seen, and macho man went to work protecting his reputation. Now he's an old man vegetating in a nursing home."

"No one left to punish," I said.

"There's Tom. He's as much to blame as his father." She stared off into space for a minute, then focused on me. "But he was just a stupid kid trying to impress his daddy." She reached across the table and tapped my earnings. "Anyhow . . . thanks. You done good." She gathered her things and stood.

I continued to sit after she'd gone. I'd never liked Tom, but I had to feel sorry for him. The first death must have been an enormous shock, to empty his mind as it had. Mrs. Curtis knew what he'd done, and she persecuted him for it. She called



him a liar and a pervert, and Tom, safe in the sound of McGuffy's harness, thought she'd been hurt in a fall and had no idea he was being punished. Then she was killed. Susan said he'd cried. Not for his mother: he'd finally been able to mourn Miss Marsh. It wasn't a horse. In Tom's eyes, she fell from grace. They both did.

I picked up my wages and stood. Something I'd said to Tom suggested another trip to McGuffy's house. I'd find the gold, then go home.

Susan sent me a newspaper clipping. McGuffy's house had burned down, and a body had been found. No identification as yet, but local realtor Tom Curtis was missing.

I figured Tom had punished himself for his part in the murders. Santucci had other thoughts. "A formidable person," he said. I think he meant Susan.

\*

I didn't give Santucci much about the reunion. I did give him the treasure. I'd said to Tom that somebody came up the sidewalk. I went back to the house, and I found it. Frank figured it out before I got to the punchline. "All those people coming into the yard," he said, which was the key: it wasn't that people were coming up the sidewalk; they'd been coming *in* to the yard. "Old dead McGuffy bouncing up and down like a Jack-in-the-box! Why didn't you tell Tom?"

"I thought I'd wait. See who bought the place next. Maybe a young couple just starting out."

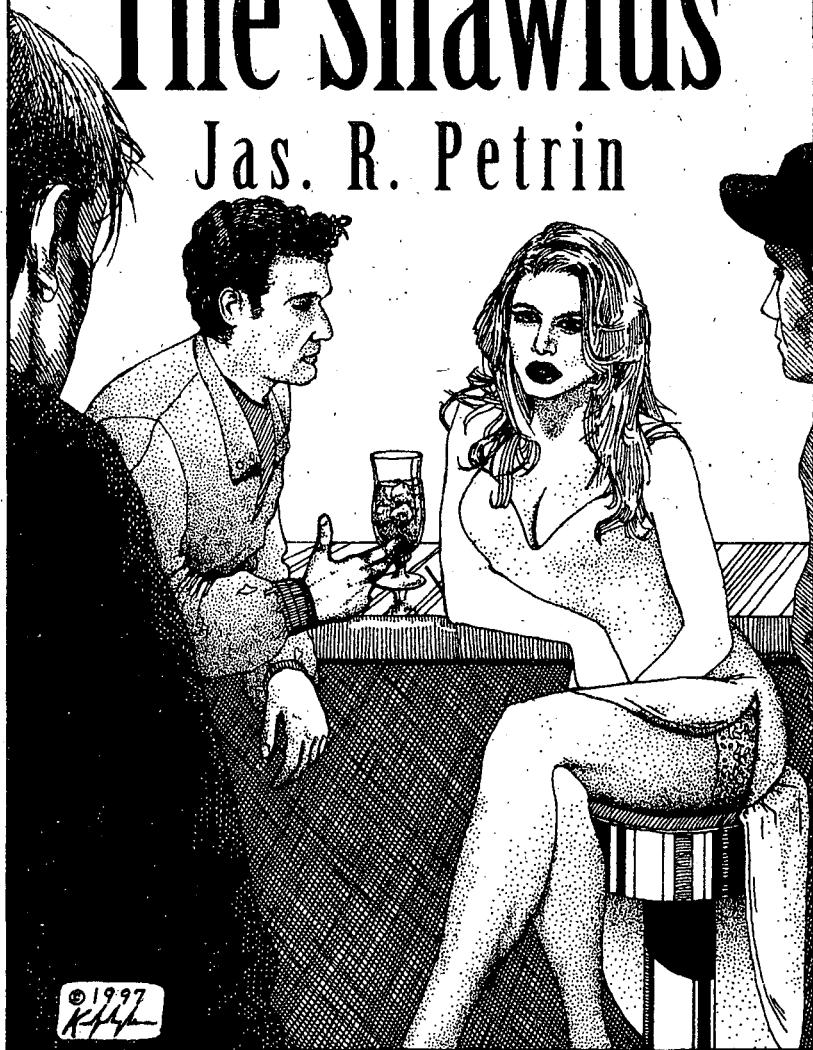
"Too late now," Frank said.

"Maybe." The clipping showed the fence and gate still standing. There was an alley in back from which the workmen could clear the debris and rebuild. Maybe the gate would continue to stand. If so, no one would have cause to wonder at its inordinate weight.

FICTION

# The Snawfus

Jas. R. Petrin



---

---

**T**his particular time some of us are sitting around a table at Donny Ruman's place, by which I mean the Brookside Hotel, and we're talking about this and that and whatever else, but mostly we're complaining that we can't get into the Lalapaloosa Club any more on account of the last time we're there Moe Fitz accidentally starts a brouhaha that drives every living soul out of the place and shatters every breakable thing. So we're trying to think of a way to reenter the good books of La-La Lloyd Laduc, owner and factotum of the Lalapaloosa Club, who objects strenuously to Moe's behavior.

While we are hard at work on this problem, a well-known individual by the name of No Time Harvey slips in through the door, and he appears to be considerably agitated. He drops into a chair as if he has been kicked. He hasn't actually been kicked, he only looks like he has, although I know a great many people who wouldn't pass up a kick at No Time, and the truth is I've had thoughts along those lines myself on occasion.

But I wouldn't kick No Time tonight, as he already looks more miserable than a dog on a mile of asphalt, and instead I ask him how he's doing, and what his views are on life in general. No Time replies in a

sullen tone, "You call this a life?"

I remark that I suppose it must do until new arrangements are made, but No Time doesn't seem keen on waiting around for that, saying, "What kind of a life is it when an old flame can step out of your past any time she likes and threaten to murder you?"

Here Bill Entwhistle perks up, saying that his first wife came back to him one time with precisely that intention, lurking outside the beer vendor for him and smiting him with a musical instrument, simply on account of him missing the odd support payment to her, which wasn't even his fault, he explains, since except for beer and tobacco money, and a few dollars for football and hockey season tickets, some cash for the VLT machines, and other unavoidable expenses, he doesn't have any disposable income in hand for the previous three years.

Naturally we all want to know what kind of a musical instrument it was, and Bill tells us he thinks it was a mandolin. "Or it could of been a banjo," he says; "I didn't get a real good look at it when I was falling down, but I heard music."

Moe Fitz then addresses No Time. "I bet I know who you're referring to. You're referring to Heartache Schindel." And see-

ing by No Time's expression that he has struck home with this shot, he turns to the rest of us. "You all remember how No Time and Heartache were once engaged to be married?"

Moe's words bring the sad facts to mind: The No Time Harvey and Heartache Schindel matrimonial no-show. I personally recall the non-event as if it was yesterday, which isn't surprising since I was to have played the part of Best Man after losing out to Stop Light Jones on a three card draw, and I don't want to get that close to an altar, or to No Time, ever again.

"What makes you think Heartache wants to murder you?" I ask No Time. "Did you give her just cause?"

He shakes his head. "No. I never give just cause for anything." And he adds reproachfully, "Though she does run off with the chauffeur of the limousine."

Now I don't like to impeach the integrity of any individual, even one such as No Time, but this is not quite the way I remember the affair. I seem to recall a very long wait at the notary public's office, not for Heartache but for No Time, who earns his label claiming he has no time for anything, which is an accurate assertion as it turns

out he doesn't even have time for his own wedding.

"So how does this present misery come about?" I ask.

No Time explains how he gets a call early that morning and it's Heartache on the line, which in itself rocks him pretty well since he has not heard from her in ages, and as a matter of fact has understood that she is cosy with somebody else just at present although he doesn't know who. And Heartache starts in telling him how she's been rethinking matters over the previous year and a half and has reached a decision: she will give No Time one last chance to be part of her life. If, however, he wants to be difficult, she will have to find some other way to "take care of things." These last words fall like a yard of winter on No Time, for he believes he knows what she's alluding to.

"Tell the rest of us," I prompt him.

"She's alluding to the fact that her intention is to murder me."

Well, at this we all look more closely at No Time, wondering how his demise might affect us personally, if at all. No Time helps himself to a beer.

"See," he says, "I know this because the phone call this morning is only the latest in a string of related and disagree-

able events. Over the past few weeks I have received death threats. And they were death threats of a most unpleasant nature. That's how I know this isn't just a coincidence."

With this confirmation we are even more interested. There isn't an individual at the table that No Time doesn't owe money to.

"What kind of death threats?" Moe Fitz wants to know.

"I believe," No Time replies, giving him a dim look, "that there is only one kind of death threat—the disagreeable kind. Unless you're asking how I come to receive these threats, in which case I can tell you that there have been three of them so far, all arriving in my mailbox without postage. And since I don't think the post office delivers them without postage, it seems likely that the sender sneaks up to my mailbox and deposits them there in person." He lets out a sigh of great misery. "So now you see the threat I'm under. Why I have to be careful."

Well, No Time may have received death threats, but in my own opinion he's taking things much too seriously, since at least so far, apparently, nobody has as much as driven a car up onto the sidewalk after him. I decide to try this line of reasoning on him, but his attention is

now fully engaged by One Lung Kroeker, who is jabbing a finger into him the size of a railroad spike, saying reprovingly, "That was a very nice *girl* you had there, No Time. You shouldn't of *treated* her like that. And the least you could do *now*, you could be *decent* to her."

"I got no time for that," No Time argues, flinching every time the spike jabs in. And glancing at his watch as if to remind himself how little time he has, especially if Heartache Schindel locates him, he jumps to his feet. "Anyways, I better get going. I can't stay in one place too long in case she discovers me. If you guys see her, make up some story, okay? Like maybe tell her I got hit by a bus."

"Hopefully it will be a true story," One Lung says in an unkindly tone as No Time beats it for the door, and Moe Fitz puts in that for two cents he will make it a true story.

Throughout all this, except for his comment about being smacked by a musical instrument, Bill Entwhistle hasn't contributed much to the general pow-wow, and so I inquire as to what's on his mind. He props his sharp elbows on the table.

"You guys are forgetting our problem. Figuring out how to smooth things over with La-La Lloyd. But luckily for you I may

have done just that. This visit from No Time gives me an idea. I see that perhaps No Time isn't as useless as I previously thought. In fact, I think he could play a key role in relieving our predicament."

Naturally we're very interested to hear what Bill Entwhistle has to say if it means getting back into the Lalapaloosa Club, and so we shut up and give him a listen.

Bill trots out his plan, and it's not too shabby, either. In fact I'm impressed. I see how Bill came to be manager of a liquor store one time before they sacked him on a false charge, as he describes it, for excessive and unexplained spillage.

"Who," he asks, "is the principal obstacle to our happiness these days?"

"La-La Lloyd," we all say.

"And why don't we go and discuss it with him?"

"Because he will break our arms and legs," Moe Fitz says.

"Exactly. We must deal with the man, but we have no access to him. Therefore we have to approach him by another route. Now then," Bill continues, "who of the female persuasion does La-La Lloyd spend his time with nowadays?"

This is a much tougher question. Over the years La-La has seen more partners than the

California gold rush, but lately he keeps very much to himself. Still, there are always rumors, of course, and Moe replies, "I think it's some woman called Mona Lepke."

Bill nods. "That's my understanding as well. And who is Mona Lepke when she is at home?"

We scratch our heads. Just who is the woman? Not one of us has ever clapped eyes on her, La-La, for some reason, keeping her well under wraps. In fact, since he takes up with her, it seems La-La himself is on a short leash and choker, since he does not appear much in public any more. I'm much surprised, therefore, when One Lung's craggy brow slowly lights from within, a surprising occurrence since the wattage there is so low. After several minutes of coughing, something that's usual for One Lung, and the reason he's called One Lung in the first place, he finally says, "Though I never actually see her, I wonder if this Mona Lepke isn't related to Teeth Lepke, maybe a cousin or a sister or something."

"That's what I wonder, too," Bill agrees. "We're getting close, very close. Now, Teeth, before he goes off on a sabbatical to Stony Mountain at the invitation of the Department of Corrections, cruised the bars with what female?"



"Why, Mave Inglis . . ."

"Right. And Mave was at one time . . ."

This is tedious work. One Lung, having had his idea for the year, is now out of replies, and shuts up. But now in my own mind the sun also rises because this is a question I can shed some light on.

"At one time Mave Inglis was Heartache Schindel's best friend, her pal from when they were waitressing together at the Winnipeg Hotel."

This seems to wrap things up cleanly for Bill. He stretches like a cat full of feathers. "There you have it," he says, "a hell of a plan, if I say so myself."

I roll him the uneasy eyeball, then glance at One Lung, who peers at Moe Fitz. Moe looks at me, then we all stare at Bill.

I say, "But you haven't told us anything yet."

"You mean none of you see it?" He basks in our puzzlement before taking pity on us. "Look," he says, "if we help out Heartache Schindel with No Time, our good deed should get back to La-La through the chain of individuals I've described, all of them first-rate gossips as you know, and general blabbermouths. And once that happens, La-La will be grateful to us."

I must say that this is too many for me.

"Suppose we do that and it

does get back to him," I say, "why should La-La Lloyd Laduc be in any way grateful about it?"

Bill gives me a slow, patient blink.

"Because," he explains, "at one time La-La had a great passion for Heartache Schindel and has carried it in his heart for her over the years."

Reconsidering, I realize Bill is correct. It's well known throughout Weston that in past times La-La Lloyd Laduc hits on Heartache Schindel regularly, even though she continues to look through him like he is an empty shot glass, especially if No Time happens to be on the other side of him. Since then, La-La goes through numerous female associates, but he still has a soft spot for Heartache and makes no secret of it. It's not unreasonable to suppose that if we're kind to her, for whatever reason, he may be touched by our efforts and call off the goons at the door of his club who are waiting to break our extremities.

Still, I have doubts.

"One second," I say. "Since La-La carries a torch for Heartache all this time, might he not take a dim view of us attempting to sew her up solid again with No Time? Might we not get into even more hot water with him?"

"No," Bill says firmly.

"Why not?" I shoot back.

"Because," he says, "unlike you guys, I keep my ear to the ground, and though I never lay eyes on this Mona, either, opinions are that he is more serious about her than with any previous woman since Heartache. And these opinions must be true, since no one sees him with other females or hears him mentioning other females since Mona Lepke comes within fifty miles of him. So I believe things should work out as planned."

Personally, I have yet to see one of our ideas work out as planned, but I'm willing to take Bill's word on this particular idea because, as I say, it's not too shabby a one, and anyway I don't know what else we can do. So I drink up with the rest of them and go out the back door. If Heartache Schindel is back on the street, we will find her. This I know.

**I**t turns out Heartache is not so difficult to locate. Remembering that, while with No Time, she enjoys knocking back the occasional Long Island iced tea in the Merryland Lounge, we quickly look in on that establishment and are duly rewarded. There she sits at a corner table with a tall glass of L.I.T. before her and her chin propped on her hand. At first we are doubtful about entering, since this too is an estab-

lishment of La-La Lloyd, but then we go on in anyway, since La-La hasn't placed it off-limits to us, though he may have just forgotten to do so.

It's early. Heartache is practically alone. The place has no other patrons except for two glamour girls sitting at the bar with their legs crossed and an unbeauteous old muzzitka, or snawfus, who is hunched against the far wall in the gloom, frowning as if she has had her shopping cart and her collection of Glad bags impounded. As for Heartache, she appears equally dismal, expressing no joy at our appearance.

Heartache is unlike most women inhabiting the Merryland. She is sophisticated. She is also redheaded and cute, with a chassis that has more curves than Detroit and that has been around the block the same number of times, though she hides the mileage well. But as I say, she is not so glad to see us. She suggests that we depart rapidly from her vicinity (though she puts it differently), implying that otherwise she will summon Ape Arms Getz, who is the host at the Merryland these days ever since he gets out of Headingly on good behavior after separating somebody's ribs.

But her mood alters when we

tell her how we have overheard the facts of her present predicament and how we all think what a shame it is that No Time treats her in this manner.

"Yes," she says, "it's a very great shame. But I'm willing to forgive him and rarely mention the matter again, provided he meets me here to discuss old times, especially the promise he made to me in this room eighteen months ago."

"Ah, it was here, was it?" I ask with suitable reverence and respect. I nudge the others. "Imagine. Here in this very room!" And we swivel our heads around, nodding most appreciatively, as if at a shrine.

Heartache laps up more tea, and for a moment I think I spot a glitter of tears, or something, in the trenches of her caked eyeliner.

"Tell me," Moe growls irritably, "why would a broad like you take a jerk like No Time back after all he's done to you?"

"Because I love him," Heartache replies, bristling. "So don't you call him a jerk!" Then she weeps a little and gets us rooting in our pockets for tissues, though all we come up with are some paper coasters from Donny Rumano's place. "I think about him a lot," she says, "and I hope you will spread the word every place you can think of."

"You mean we should tell No Time?" I ask.

"I mean you should tell everybody," she says.

I give her hand an affectionate pat, and it's quite a duke, too, slender and shapely but with nails on it of a length and sharpness that would make an axe murderer flinch. "Miss Schindel," I say, "we want you to know that we're sorry to see you in this predicament with No Time. It pains us, and we want to help, don't we, boys?"

The boys mumble supportively, nodding their heads like car window ornaments.

"We'll kill him for you," One Lung tells Heartache earnestly, wringing his baseball cap in his hands and speaking in what for him is a most kindly voice.

I kick him so hard in the ankle that his eyes glaze over. "What One Lung means to say," I explain, "is that we'll be happy to reeducate No Time, convince him to meet with you, and deliver him to any private place of your choosing at whatever date and time is most convenient."

"I don't want to see him in a private place," she says firmly. "It has to be here."

"Then here it will be," I reply.

Her big brown eyes gather us in, and it's a good thing she's been around the block so many times, and up the alley once or twice, or the sight will probably

cause her to leap up and flee from the room. Her large bosom heaves.

"You guys would do that for me?"

"Most certainly we would. In fact, we won't be happy until this matter is rectified." I am thinking of the Lalapaloosa Club when I say this, and from the others there is sympathetic grunting.

"We're your friends," I assure her solemnly.

Grunting.

"We're here to help you."

More grunting.

At all this syrupy talk Heartache Schindel seems to be experiencing a wave of emotion, or a wave of something, anyway. But in any case she refrains from signaling Ape Arms to approach and have his way with us, and settles down and begins to talk business. In short order we have arranged the details with her and then take our leave to track down No Time Harvey.

We have to poke around a bit to locate No Time, since he has squirreled himself away nicely in order to avoid Heartache Schindel. We finally ferret him out in the back room of the Golden Cue billiard lounge, where he is practicing his english with one eye on the cue ball and one on the door. When he sees it's only us, he relaxes and leans on

his cue, though if he knows why we're here, he will probably out with the howitzer he carries and boom-boom away at us fiercely.

"No Time," I say in a brotherly fashion, slipping a glass of beer into his hand and guiding him gently to a bench, "you will never guess who we just ran into, by accident, not two hours ago up the street."

"Hmm," he says, screwing up his face at the challenge, "you must mean Fifty-two Wilbur. I hear he's in town."

"No," I reply, "it was someone of the opposite persuasion."

"Then I guess you're referring to Honeyboy Watson."

"Not Honeyboy, no. Somebody more persuaded than that."

He thinks hard, knotting his brow.

"I suppose, then, you mean to say a woman . . ." His voice trails off at sudden insight, and trepidation scatters glints of fluorescent lamplight in his eyes. "You don't mean . . ."

"That's right," I say, now that the others have had time to cluster closely about and box him in pretty good. "We have just come from speaking with Heartache Schindel."

Maybe it's the name, or the look on our faces, but at this remark No Time launches himself straight up into the air. I never see anything like it. One mo-

ment he's lounging on the bench completely relaxed; and the next he's rocketing into the air like a clay pigeon, nearly clearing the height and breadth of One Lung Kroeker, and would have cleared him, too, if One Lung does not lift his large mitt and knock No Time back down on the bench again, like a fly.

This discourages No Time from further athletics. He lies crumpled on the bench with his knees drawn up to his chin. Still, his eyes are wide open, and under his jacket his Detroit Pistons sweatshirt is pulsing up and down, up and down, over his skinny ribs and his heart. And when he finally speaks, his tone of voice reveals his resentment at this turn of events.

"All right," he croaks, "what is the plan with you guys?"

"The plan?" I slip the howitzer from his pocket just to be on the safe side. "Our plan is to have you accompany us to the Merryland Lounge tonight for a meeting with Miss Heartache Schindel, and to have you sit down like a gentleman with her, and—"

"I can't meet with her," he says flatly.

"Why can't you?"

"Because," he says, "I don't have time. And in any case she's planning to kill me."

"She wouldn't. She won't."

"Yes, she would and she will.

Don't forget those death threats I got. And besides, when she promises to do a thing, she will do it, which will make you guys accessories after the fact, so that you'll probably wind up going to the penitentiary for several years to watch Oprah and take your degrees."

"I've got two degrees already," Bill says, which is true so far as I know; he has something in business, and something else in commerce. "This would make my third."

"Nobody," growls One Lung defiantly, "is giving me no third degree."

"Look, we aren't visiting the penitentiary," I inform them. "Everything will be amicable, and everybody will be amiable, and we will all come out of this satisfied and glad, with the possible exception of No Time Harvey, here.

"No Time," I say, "you're going through with this, and that's final."

"It'll be final, all right," No Time mumbles.

But he sees our determination, and our grim resolution, and not being foolhardy, he decides that he will come along with us quietly.

Well, not so quietly, since he moans and mutters the whole time, claiming we are stabbing him in the back and betraying him, and making a human sacri-

fice out of him, which is all nonsense, as we haven't even shown him a knife, let alone stabbed him, and as far as sacrifices go he would not make so very human a one. But he natters on anyway, claiming that he has no time for all this.

In the outer room I spot the snawfus again. The same muzzitka who only a short while ago was singlehandedly reducing the profit margin in the lounge at the Merryland Hotel. Moe Fitz spots her, too, and frowns, remarking that in all probability she is touring the drinking establishments in order to scrape flattened beer cans up off the parking lots for her collection.

Since it's still early, we take No Time to Moe Fitz's room above the bar at the Brookside Hotel to wait out the rest of the afternoon and early part of the evening. No Time is a slippery individual, and so at all times we keep him under close surveillance, and keep our eye on him.

When it is time, we conduct him to the Merryland Lounge. There we sit him down with a double whisky straight up and with admonitions not to try anything, as we will be situated between him and his means of egress, which is to say the door. We have only moments to wait. Heartache shows up promptly, dressed to kill. I mean by this

that she is attired smartly, not that she has come to put anybody out of the way, although for all I know she may be equipped to do just that.

I nod in the direction of No Time's table. She draws in a lungful of secondhand smoke, then stalks to the back of the room and plunks herself down with him.

So far so good. Things are coming along nicely. But at this moment I again notice the unbeauteous muzzitka, who is now slouched like a sack at a corner table. She's getting to be a most annoying old slummock dogging us like this as if on the chance that we might drop a beer can on the ground, so I suggest to Moe that perhaps we should interview this individual. Together we move in on her, myself all frowns and business, and Moe very menacing in his vig-squeezing way.

Moe says to her, "All right, Mom, what is it? Do you like our company so much? Are you starting a fan club for us, or just what?"

This snawfus is a sight to behold, and I have beheld many a sight in my time. She has some sort of a knitted cap pulled down low over her ears and carries an entire wardrobe on her back, wearing more layers of clothing than I ever see on a single individual. She has a

glass of water in front of her which the waiter has brought, but she is drinking from a bottle nestled half inside her numerous coats. After Moe runs through his patter, she lowers the bottle and says, "Bug off, Jake!"

Moe is smitten by this rudeness.

"Now, listen here—" he begins in a testy way, but breaks off suddenly at the sight of a large howitzer the snawfus conjures up from some secret place about her person. She is a walking clothing, liquor, and armaments store. She levels the firearm at us menacingly from the recesses of her clothing.

"No," she says, "you listen, Jake. I don't know why you're following me around like this, but I'll tell you one thing, Cause me any trouble and I will put more holes in you than they found in Bonnie and Clyde's backsides. Do you know what I'm telling you?"

Well, she's got the drop on us, there's no doubt about it, and so it is best for us to be discreet. We back away slowly and deferentially and resume our places at the bar.

"Well," Bill says, "did you find out what the snawfus is about?"

"Moe did," I reply.

"Yes," Moe says, "she's a gun collector."

But I don't care any more

about the muzzitka. I'm more interested in how our plan is developing. I would give anything to hear what transpires between No Time and Heartache, but it's not possible. The evening crowd has filtered in. People are laughing and talking, and there is even a group of football players carrying on loudly, so not only can't I hear No Time and Heartache, I can't even see them very well. It takes much craning of my neck before I discover that only Heartache is at the table, with No Time Harvey nowhere to be seen.

Now, this is truly most discouraging. I can't think how No Time got by us, except perhaps he sneaks out while Moe and I are engaged with the snawfus. I'm inclined to say unkind things to Bill and One Lung, since they ought to have been more alert, but it won't bring No Time back, and so we sit there indecisively.

At that moment I spot La-La Lloyd at the door. He is standing with his head tipped toward the hairy ear of Ape Arms Getz, whispering words to him. At first I'm alarmed, thinking he is arranging for our ejection, but then I realize that they are not even looking at us. It then occurs to me that perhaps La-La noticed No Time before No Time takes off and is therefore him-



self a witness to our good intentions.

Ape Arms points out Heartache, and La-La goes over to her. I wonder if I should join him to make sure Heartache tells him what a help we've been to her; but at that moment there is a shot. It's a very loud shot, too. And the shot is followed by a piercing scream that leaps through me like a bent and rusted coat hanger.

The crowd opens revealing a terrible scene.

At Heartache's table, La-La Lloyd is stretched flat out on the floor, and the snawfus is standing over him, waving her howitzer around. Then everyone is hollering and diving for cover. Maybe the confusion alarms her, or maybe it's a nervous reaction, but the next thing we know the snawfus is boom-boom-booming in all directions. Ape Arms rushes in but is blocked by the crowd. He is picking people up and setting them to one side, which works fine until he attempts to relocate a large footballer who is anxious to leave, and this footballer strikes Ape Arms on the honker, an easy target since Ape Arms's face is mostly honker and not much else. Ape Arms knocks the footballer down, and the entire football team then starts taking the bar apart.

In the midst of all this I spot

Heartache. She is greatly annoyed. Her face is contorted. She is climbing over the table with her skirt hiked over her knees, sending drinks flying and swiping at the Snawfus with her long fingernails. The snawfus reels backward, overturning tables loaded with drinks of every description.

A glare of sunlight floods the room. I turn to see Bill Entwistle making his escape. I take one step after him, but then an electric light factory explodes inside my head, and I don't notice much else after that.

**W**hen I awake, my head feels like a picture I once see of the Liberty Bell, which has that big crack in it. My eyes are stuck shut, and it takes all my strength to open them, which isn't very much strength but it's all I have. I see that I'm in a hospital room filled with medical authorities of every description.

But though there are numerous doctors and nurses, none of them are administering to me, or holding cooling cloths to my forehead, or whatever they do for you in hospitals, which I don't know because hospitals are places I try not to be in. These medics are more concerned with the individual in the bed next to mine, clustered

about and giving him first rate attention as if I myself am only keeping the bed warm for the next important casualty.

They probe and test until they have enough bodily fluids in their possession to satisfy them, at which point they go away, completely ignoring me. Then I see that my roommate is no other than La-La Lloyd, and quite naturally I'm not too pleased by this. I slip out of bed and beat it to the window, my bare feet going slip, slip, slip on the cold tile, but the window doesn't open for me, being some sort of safety window. So I get back in bed and hike the sheet over my face, hoping that they take the armaments away from La-La before they tuck him in bed. If he was upset about his Lalapaloosa Club, he will probably be even more agitated now.

Then La-La speaks in a dry, creaking voice, saying to me, "Thanks, pal. Thanks very much!"

"You're very welcome," I mutter feebly, though I have no idea what he's talking about unless it's a smart remark, some sort of sarcasm.

These words seem to have tired La-La out, and I have to wait several minutes for the next installment.

"You helped me out," he finally says. "You did me a service."

"Ah yes," I say, "and what service is that?"

As if I have rendered him numerous services over the years.

"Well," he says, "the service of resolving a great personal problem for me."

I'm baffled. I wonder if he's hallucinating. After all, the Merryland must now look like the Lalapaloosa Club after Moe's general uprising. Then I wonder if La-La is hinting at a possible insurance scam, which would be just his style. But then I discover it isn't insurance but a personal matter, just as he says.

He tells me the snawfus is no other than Mona Lepke, and his relationship with her is not what we had thought. She is not his girlfriend but his financial backer, providing the funds with which he jump-starts his enterprises. La-La explains that her appearance is deceiving, that she is in fact worth several fortunes, having cashed in many cartloads of flattened beer cans and plastic milk jugs in her time. The problem arises, says La-La, when she doesn't stay silent, expecting more in return than black-inked ledger sheets and desiring attention of a more personal sort.

But La-La isn't keen on giving her personal attention, which is an attitude I am much in sympathy with. And since she knows that Heartache is the

woman La-La *would* like to get personal with, the snawfus gets nasty and stakes them both out.

"She puts a nose on you?" I ask La-La. A nose being a private dick.

"No," La-La says, "she doesn't hire a nose. She doesn't get rich paying wages. She does the work herself, sometimes following Heartache, sometimes following me, and noting many occurrences, of course, and putting the wrong spin on them."

"The wrong spin?"

"Her spin."

"Oh, right."

"The correct spin," La-La continues, "is my spin. It is that Heartache and I are quite innocent. Certainly I visit her apartment at times, and she gets in and out of my car on occasion, and the two of us meet in the same motel room each week; but these are innocent things and Mona makes too much of them. Heartache and me are just friends, of course. We get together to discuss old times. Our relationship is purely atomic."

"Platonic," Heartache corrects him gently, coming into the room and taking his hand and looking at him as if he is the greatest thing since central heating. Now that Heartache is here, I have a question for her.

I say to her, "But I thought . . . that is to say, *we* thought . . . that you loved No Time and

wanted to get back together with him."

"That was ages ago. You don't think I pined for the slob all this time, do you?"

I give up. There are undercurrents in this river, and my backstroke is not what it once was.

"I was just explaining to him," La-La tells her.

"Don't you tire yourself," Heartache says, "let me do it." And she sits on the bed. "You see," she says to me, "we had a quarrel. So to make La-La jealous I spread it around that I still loved No Time. Then when you showed up, I accepted your offer. I mean, why wouldn't I? And I made sure La-La knew about it, too." At this she chucks La-La under the rib bandages, saying, "Isn't that right Poopykins?" and La-La, grinning back with an expression that is caused perhaps by the baby talk or perhaps by the bullet holes in him, replies, "Yes indeed, Honey-wuns," and she goes on with her story.

"My plan was working fine until Mona started shooting."

I remember vividly the boom-boom and the bang-bang, and I nod knowingly as La-La flinches.

"And so," I say to her, beginning to understand things, "you go over the table with your switchblades out to avenge him."

"When I see him on the floor like that? Yes, of course I do. Don't I, Poopy?" And she says to me then, "So that's all there is to it."

"But what about the death threats in No Time's mailbox?"

"I put them there," says Poopy—I mean La-La. "But they were only very gentle suggestions."

"You threatened him?" Heartache says warmly. "Oh, how sweet!" And she kisses him and hugs him around the bandages so hard she brings tears to his eyes. Her face clouds over, however, as she turns to me again.

"There's one remaining problem, though, that maybe you can help me with. When No Time hears later what has happened, he thinks I was defending *him* from Mona Lepke. Maybe he thinks this because of the death threats. Anyway, he is so impressed that the jerk falls in love with me. Can you think of some way to get rid of him?"

**B**ack at Donny Ru-  
mano's, I'm explaining  
the situation. "So La-  
La is pleased," I tell  
them, "that the snawfus ceases  
to be a problem on account of  
her being arrested and carted off  
to the slammer. But now we  
have to discourage No Time and  
make sure that he leaves Heart-  
ache Schindel alone."

"Well, here's our chance," Moe mutters darkly, raising bushy black eyebrows at the doorway.

We turn to look, and sure enough, here comes No Time Harvey sloping towards us with a very wide smile slapped across his mug. And when he sits down with us, it's as if he has just rejoined the long-lost pals and buddies of his youth. He even looks favorably on One Lung.

"Well," he says, nodding all around and grinning hugely, "how are we today? Can I get anybody a drink? Or should I buy a round for the table, maybe that's the idea, huh?"

"What are you so happy about?" Moe Fitz inquires irritably.

No Time stops and smooths his hair back as if it has never occurred to him to wonder about that particular question. His radiance briefly fades, then comes beaming right back again. "Well," he says, "why shouldn't I be happy? Life is great, and I am surrounded by friends. Why wouldn't I be?"

"We thought you didn't have time for friends," Bill remarks. And glancing around with a cynical look, he adds, "Though I can't say I see anyone of that description here as far as you are concerned."

No Time takes a moment to look at him, and then grins even more broadly.

"Heck, you are all my friends, every last one of you. You saved me from making the biggest mistake of my life. You got me back together with Heartache."

His eyes then grow misty as I edge closer to him.

"That is something we'd like to get straight with you, No Time," I say. "This new love you have for Heartache. We don't think it's appropriate."

No Time stiffens as if I have just dumped a beer in his lap. "How is that again?"

"You heard him," One Lung growls.

And Moe chimes in, saying, "We're telling you to stay away from Heartache and not bother her any more."

No Time now has a facial expression which is the same as I once saw on Moe Fitz when Tommy Hightops slips up behind him and slaps him on the ear with a beer tray. Sort of dazed.

"But hold on," he says, "it was you guys that set me back up

again with her. It was you guys who told me that—"

"Never mind what we told you then," I say to him, "listen to what we're telling you *now*. We want you to stay away from her, and not phone her, or send things to her, or bother her in any way, shape or form, that's what we're saying, and that's what we mean, okay?"

No Time gulps air for a minute, then jumps up so fast his chair falls over.

"You guys are crazy! You're totally out of it! First you say one thing, then you say another! A guy don't know what to make of it. I've had it with you!"

And he departs at top speed.

"Well," Moe Fitz says, "there goes an unsatisfied customer."

"Very thin-skinned," Bill Ent-whistle says, nodding. "I wonder why."

"Maybe it's love," suggests One Lung Kroeker.

But love being something we don't know much about, we can't comment.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# The Head of Caesar

G. K. Chesterton



**T**here is somewhere in Brompton or Kensington an interminable avenue of tall houses, rich but largely empty, that looks like a terrace of tombs. The very steps up to the dark front doors seem as steep as the side of pyramids; one would hesitate to knock at the door lest it should be opened by a mummy. But a yet more depressing feature in the grey facade is its telescopic length and changeless continuity. The pilgrim walking down it begins to think he will never come to a break or a corner; but there is one exception—a very small one, but hailed by the pilgrim almost with a shout. There is a sort of mews between two of the tall mansions, a mere slit like the crack of a door by comparison with the street, but just large enough to permit a pygmy alehouse or eating house, still allowed by the rich to their stable servants, to stand in the angle. There is something cheery in its very dinginess, and something free and elfin in its very insignificance. At the feet of those grey stone giants it looks like a lighted house of dwarfs.

Anyone passing the place during a certain autumn evening, itself almost fairylike, might have seen a hand pull aside the red half-blind which (along with some large white lettering) half hid the interior from the street, and a face peer out not unlike a rather innocent goblin's. It was, in fact, the face of one with the harmless human name of Brown, formerly priest of Cobhole in Essex and, now working in London. His friend Flambeau, a semi-official investigator, was sitting opposite him, making his last notes of a case he had cleared up in the neighborhood. They were sitting at a small table, close up to the window when the priest pulled the curtain back and looked out. He waited till a stranger in the street had passed the window to let the curtain fall into its place again. Then his round eyes rolled to the large white lettering on the window above his head, and then strayed to the next table, at which sat only a navvy with beer and cheese, and a young girl with red hair and a glass of milk. Then (seeing his friend put away the pocket-book) he said softly,

"If you've got ten minutes, I wish you'd follow that man with the false nose."

Flambeau looked up in surprise, but the girl with the red hair also looked up, and with something that was stronger than astonishment. She was simply and even loosely dressed in light brown sacking stuff, but she was a lady, and even, on a second glance, a



rather needlessly haughty one. "The man with the false nose!" repeated Flambeau. "Who's he?"

"I haven't a notion," answered Father Brown. "I want you to find out; I ask it as a favor. He went down there—" and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder in one of his undistinguished gestures "—and can't have passed three lampposts yet. I only want to know the direction."

Flambeau gazed at his friend for some time, with an expression between perplexity and amusement, and then, rising from the table, squeezed his huge form out of the little door of the dwarf tavern and melted into the twilight.

Father Brown took a small book out of his pocket and began to read steadily; he betrayed no consciousness of the fact that the red-haired lady had left her own table and sat down opposite him. At last she leaned over and said in a low, strong voice, "Why do you say that? How do you know it's false?"

He lifted his rather heavy eyelids, which fluttered in considerable embarrassment. Then his dubious eye roamed again to the white lettering on the glass front of the public house. The young woman's eyes followed his and rested there also, but in pure puzzlement.

"No," said Father Brown, answering her thoughts. "It doesn't say 'Sela,' like the thing in the Psalms; I read it like that myself when I was wool-gathering just now; it says 'Ales.'"

"Well?" inquired the staring young lady. "What does it matter what it says?"

His ruminating eye roved to the girl's light canvas sleeve, round the wrist of which ran a very slight thread of artistic pattern, just enough to distinguish it from a working-dress of a common woman and make it more like the working-dress of a lady art student. He seemed to find much food for thought in this, but his reply was very slow and hesitant. "You see, madam," he said, "from outside the place looks—well, it is a perfectly decent place, but ladies like you don't—don't generally think so. They never go into such places from choice, except—"

"Well?" she repeated.

"Except an unfortunate few who don't go in to drink milk."

"You are a most singular person," said the young lady. "What is your object in all this?"

"Not to trouble you about it," he replied very gently. "Only to arm myself with knowledge enough to help you, if ever you freely ask my help."

"But why should I need help?"

He continued his dreamy monologue. "You couldn't have come in to see protégées, humble friends, that sort of thing, or you'd have gone through into the parlor . . . and you couldn't have come in because you were ill, or you'd have spoken to the woman of the place, who's obviously respectable . . . besides, you don't look ill in that way, but only unhappy. . . . This street is the only original long lane that has no turning, and the houses on both sides are shut up. . . . I could only suppose that you'd seen somebody coming whom you didn't want to meet and found the public house was the only shelter in this wilderness of stone. . . . I don't think I went beyond the license of a stranger in glancing at the only man who passed immediately after. . . . And as I thought he looked like the wrong sort . . . and you looked like the right sort . . . I held myself ready to help if he annoyed you; that is all. As for my friend, he'll be back soon, and he certainly can't find out anything by stumping down a road like this. . . . I didn't think he could."

"Then why did you send him out?" she cried, leaning forward with yet warmer curiosity. She had the proud, impetuous face that goes with reddish coloring, and a Roman nose, as it did in Marie Antoinette.

He looked at her steadily for the first time, and said, "Because I hoped you would speak to me."

She looked back at him for some time with a heated face, in which there hung a red shadow of anger; then, despite her anxieties, humor broke out of her eyes and the corners of her mouth, and she answered almost grimly, "Well, if you're so keen on my conversation, perhaps you'll answer my question." After a pause she added, "I had the honor to ask you why you thought the man's nose was false."

"The wax always spots like that just a little in this weather," answered Father Brown with entire simplicity.

"But it's such a crooked nose," remonstrated the redhaired girl.

The priest smiled in his turn. "I don't say it's the sort of nose one would wear out of mere foppery," he admitted. "This man, I think, wears it because his real nose is so much nicer."

"But why?" she insisted.

"What is the nursery rhyme?" observed Brown absentmindedly. "There was a crooked man and he went a crooked mile. . . . That man, I fancy, has gone a very crooked road—by following his nose."

"Why, what's he done?" she demanded rather shakily.

"I don't want to force your confidence by a hair," said Father Brown very quietly. "But I think you could tell me more about that than I can tell you."

The girl sprang to her feet and stood quite quietly but with clenched hands, like one about to stride away; then her hands loosened slowly, and she sat down again. "You are more of a mystery than all the others," she said desperately, "but I feel there might be a heart in your mystery."

"What we all dread most," said the priest in a low voice, "is a maze with no center. That is why atheism is only a nightmare."

"I will tell you everything," said the redhaired girl doggedly, "except why I am telling you, and that I don't know."

She picked at the darned tablecloth and went on: "You look as if you knew what isn't snobbery as well as what is, and when I say that ours is a good old family, you'll understand it is a necessary part of the story; indeed, my chief danger is in my brother's high-and-dry notions, *noblesse oblige* and all that. Well, my name is Christabel Carstairs, and my father was that Colonel Carstairs you've probably heard of, who made the famous Carstairs Collection of Roman coins. I could never describe my father to you; the nearest I can say is that he was very like a Roman coin himself. He was as handsome and as genuine and as valuable and as metallic and as out-of-date. He was prouder of his collection than of his coat-of-arms—nobody could say more than that. His extraordinary character came out most in his will. He had two sons and one daughter. He quarreled with one son, my brother Giles, and sent him to Australia on a small allowance. He then made a will leaving the Carstairs Collection, actually with a yet smaller allowance, to my brother Arthur. He meant it as a reward, as the highest honor he could offer, in acknowledgment of Arthur's loyalty and rectitude and the distinctions he had already gained in mathematics and economics at Cambridge. He left me practically all his pretty large fortune, and I am sure he meant it in contempt.

"Arthur, you may say, might well complain of this, but Arthur is my father over again. Though he had some differences with my father in early youth, no sooner had he taken over the collection than he became like a pagan priest dedicated to a temple. He mixed up these Roman halfpence with the honor of the Carstairs family in the same stiff, idolatrous way as his father before him. He acted as if Roman money must be guarded by all the Roman virtues. He took no pleasures; he spent nothing on himself; he lived for the col-

lection. Often he would not trouble to dress for his simple meals but pottered about among the corded brown paper parcels (which no one else was allowed to touch) in an old brown dressing gown. With its rope and tassel and his pale, thin, refined face, it made him look like an old ascetic monk. Every now and then, though, he would appear dressed like a decidedly fashionable gentleman, but that was only when he went up to the London sales or shops to make an addition to the Carstairs Collection.

"Now, if you've known any young people, you won't be shocked if I say that I got into rather a low frame of mind with all this, the frame of mind in which one begins to say that the ancient Romans were all very well in their way. I'm not like my brother Arthur; I can't help enjoying enjoyment. I got a lot of romance and rubbish where I got my red hair, from the other side of the family. Poor Giles was the same, and I think the atmosphere of coins might count in excuse for him, though he really did wrong and nearly went to prison. But he didn't behave any worse than I did; as you shall hear.

"I come now to the silly part of the story. I think a man as clever as you can guess the sort of thing that would begin to relieve the monotony for an unruly girl of seventeen placed in such a position. But I am so rattled with more dreadful things that I can hardly read my own feeling and don't know whether I despise it now as a flirtation or bear it as a broken heart. We lived then at a little seaside watering place in South Wales, and a retired sea captain living a few doors off had a son about five years older than myself who had been a friend of Giles before he went to the Colonies. His name does not affect my tale; but I tell you it was Philip Hawker because I am telling you everything. We used to go shrimping together, and said and thought we were in love with each other; at least he certainly said he was, and I certainly thought I was. If I tell you he had bronzed curly hair and a falconish sort of face, bronzed by the sea also, it's not for his sake, I assure you, but for the story, for it was the cause of a very curious coincidence.

"One summer afternoon, when I had promised to go shrimping along the sands with Philip, I was waiting rather impatiently in the front drawing room, watching Arthur handle some packets of coins he had just purchased and slowly shunt them, one or two at a time, into his own dark study and museum which was at the back of the house. As soon as I heard the heavy door close on him finally, I made a bolt for my shrimping net and tam-o'-shanter and was just

going to slip out when I saw that my brother had left behind him one coin that lay gleaming on the long bench by the window. It was a bronze coin, and the color, combined with the exact curve of the Roman nose and something in the very lift of the long, wiry neck, made the head of Caesar on it the almost precise portrait of Philip Hawker. Then I suddenly remembered Giles telling Philip of a coin that was like him, and Philip wishing he had it. Perhaps you can fancy the wild, foolish thoughts with which my head went round; I felt as if I had had a gift from the fairies. It seemed to me that if I could only run away with this and give it to Philip like a wild sort of wedding ring, it would be a bond between us forever; I felt a thousand such things at once. Then there yawned under me, like the pit, the enormous, awful notion of what I was doing, above all the unbearable thought, which was like touching hot iron, of what Arthur would think of it. A Carstairs a thief, and a thief of the Carstairs treasure! I believe my brother could see me burned like a witch for such a thing. But then the very thought of such fanatical cruelty heightened my old hatred of his dingy old antiquarian fussiness and my longing for the youth and liberty that called to me from the sea. Outside was strong sunlight with a wind, and a yellow head of some broom or gorse in the garden rapped against the glass of the window. I thought of that living and growing gold calling to me from all the heaths of the world—and then of that dead, dull gold and bronze and brass of my brother's growing dustier and dustier as life went by. Nature and the Carstairs' Collection had come to grips at last.

"Nature is older than the Carstairs Collection. As I ran down the streets to the sea, the coin clenched tight in my fist, I felt all the Roman Empire on my back as well as the Carstairs pedigree. It was not only the old lion argent that was roaring in my ear but all the eagles of the Caesars seemed flapping and screaming in pursuit of me. And yet my heart rose higher and higher like a child's kite until I came over the loose, dry sandhills and to the flat, wet sands, where Philip stood already up to his ankles in the shallow shining water, some hundred yards out to sea. There was a great red sunset, and the long stretch of low water, hardly rising over the ankle for half a mile, was like a lake of ruby flame. It was not till I had torn off my shoes and stockings and waded to where he stood, which was well away from the dry land, that I turned and looked round. We were quite alone in a circle of seawater and wet sand, and I gave him the head of Caesar.

"At the very instant I had a shock of fancy: that a man far away on the sandhills was looking at me intently. I must have felt immediately after that it was a mere leap of unreasonable nerves, for the man was only a dark dot in the distance, and I could only just see that he was standing quite still and gazing, with his head a little on one side. There was no earthly logical evidence that he was looking at me; he might have been looking at a ship, or the sunset, or the seagulls, or at any of the people who still strayed here and there on the shore between us. Nevertheless, whatever my start sprang from was prophetic, for as I gazed, he started walking briskly in a beeline towards us across the wide wet sands. As he drew nearer and nearer, I saw that he was dark and bearded and that his eyes were marked with dark spectacles. He was dressed poorly but respectably in black, from the old black top hat on his head to the solid black boots on his feet. In spite of these he walked straight into the sea without a flash of hesitation and came on at me with the steadiness of a traveling bullet.

"I can't tell you the sense of monstrosity and miracle I had when he thus silently burst the barrier between land and water. It was as if he had walked straight off a cliff and still marched steadily in midair. It was as if a house had flown up into the sky or a man's head had fallen off. He was only wetting his boots, but he seemed to be a demon disregarding a law of Nature. If he had hesitated an instant at the water's edge, it would have been nothing. As it was, he seemed to look so much at me alone as not to notice the ocean. Philip was some yards away with his back to me, bending over his net. The stranger came on till he stood within two yards of me, the water washing halfway up to his knees. Then he said, with a clearly modulated and rather mincing articulation, 'Would it discommodate you to contribute elsewhere a coin with a somewhat different superscription?'

"With one exception there was nothing definably abnormal about him. His tinted glasses were not really opaque but of a blue kind common enough, nor were the eyes behind them shifty but regarded me steadily. His dark beard was not really long or wild, but he looked rather hairy because the beard began very high up in his face, just under the cheekbones. His complexion was neither sallow nor livid, but on the contrary rather clear and youthful, yet this gave a pink and white wax look which somehow (I don't know why) rather increased the horror. The only oddity one could fix was that his nose, which was otherwise of a good shape, was just slightly

turned sideways at the tip, as if, when it was soft, it had been tapped on one side with a toy hammer. The thing was hardly a deformity; yet I cannot tell you what a living nightmare it was to me. As he stood there in the sunset-stained water, he affected me as some hellish sea monster just risen roaring out of a sea like blood. I don't know why a touch on the nose should affect my imagination so much. I think it seemed as if he could move his nose like a finger. And as if he had just that moment moved it.

"Any little assistance," he continued with the same queer, priggish accent, "that may obviate the necessity of my communicating with the family."

"Then it rushed over me that I was being blackmailed for the theft of the bronze piece, and all my merely superstitious fears and doubts were swallowed up in one overpowering, practical question. How could he have found out? I had stolen the thing suddenly and on impulse; I was certainly alone, for I always made sure of being unobserved when I slipped out to see Philip in this way. I had not, to all appearance, been followed in the street, and if I had, they could not X-ray the coin in my closed hand. The man standing on the sandhills could no more have seen what I gave Philip than shoot a fly in one eye, like the man in the fairy tale.

"Philip," I cried helplessly, "ask this man what he wants."

"When Philip lifted his head at last from mending his net, he looked rather red, as if sulky or ashamed, but it may have been only the exertion of stooping and the red evening light; I may have only had another of the morbid fancies that seemed to be dancing about me. He merely said gruffly to the man: 'You clear out of this.' And motioning me to follow, set off wading shoreward without paying further attention to him. He stepped onto a stone breakwater that ran out from among the roots of the sandhills, and so struck homeward, perhaps thinking our incubus would find it less easy to walk on such rough stones, green and slippery with seaweed, than we who were young and used to it. But my persecutor walked as daintily as he talked, and he still followed me, picking his way and picking his phrases. I heard his delicate, detestable voice appealing to me over my shoulder, until at last, when we had crested the sandhills, Philip's patience (which was by no means so conspicuous on most occasions) seemed to snap. He turned suddenly, saying, 'Go back. I can't talk to you now.' And as the man hovered and opened his mouth, Philip struck him a buffet on it that sent him flying



from the top of the tallest sandhill to the bottom. I saw him crawling out below, covered with sand.

"This stroke comforted me somehow, though it might well increase my peril, but Philip showed none of his usual elation at his own prowess. Though as affectionate as ever, he still seemed cast down, and before I could ask him anything fully, he parted with me at his own gate with two remarks that struck me as strange. He said that, all things considered, I ought to put the coin back in the collection but that he himself would keep it 'for the present.' And then he added quite suddenly and irrelevantly: 'You know Giles is back from Australia?'"

The door of the tavern opened, and the gigantic shadow of the investigator Flambeau fell across the table. Father Brown presented him to the lady in his own slight, persuasive style of speech, mentioning his knowledge and sympathy in such cases, and almost without knowing, the girl was soon reiterating her story to two listeners. But Flambeau, as he bowed and sat down, handed the priest a small slip of paper. Brown accepted it with some surprise and read on it: "Cab to Wagga Wagga, 379, Mafeking Avenue, Putney." The girl was going on with her story.

"I went up the steep street to my own house with my head in a whirl; it had not begun to clear when I came to the doorstep, on which I found a milk can—and the man with the twisted nose. The milk can told me the servants were all out, for of course Arthur, browsing about in his brown dressing gown in a brown study, would not hear or answer a bell. Thus there was no one to help me in the house except my brother, whose help must be my ruin. In desperation I thrust two shillings into the horrid thing's hand and told him to call again in a few days when I had thought it out. He went off sulking, but more sheepishly than I had expected—perhaps he had been shaken by his fall—and I watched the star of sand splashed on his back receding down the road with a horrid, vindictive pleasure. He turned a corner some six houses down.

"Then I let myself in, made myself some tea, and tried to think it out. I sat at the drawing room window looking onto the garden, which still glowed with the last full evening light. But I was too distracted and dreamy to look at the lawns and flowerpots and flowerbeds with any concentration. So I took the shock the more sharply because I'd seen it so slowly.

"The man or monster I'd sent away was standing quite still in the middle of the garden. Oh, we've all read a lot about pale-faced

phantoms in the dark, but this was more dreadful than anything of that kind could ever be. Because, though he cast a long evening shadow, he still stood in warm sunlight. And because his face was not pale but had that waxen bloom still upon it that belongs to a barber's dummy. He stood quite still, with his face towards me, and I can't tell you how horrid he looked among the tulips and all those tall, gaudy, almost hothouse-looking flowers. It looked as if we'd stuck up a waxwork instead of a statue in the center of our garden.

"Yet almost the instant he saw me move in the window he turned and ran out of the garden by the back gate, which stood open and by which he had undoubtedly entered. This renewed timidity on his part was so different from the impudence with which he had walked into the sea that I felt vaguely comforted. I fancied, perhaps, that he feared confronting Arthur more than I knew. Anyhow, I settled down at last and had a quiet dinner alone (for it was against the rules to disturb Arthur when he was rearranging the museum), and my thoughts, a little released, fled to Philip and lost themselves, I suppose. Anyhow, I was looking blankly, but rather pleasantly than otherwise, at another window, uncurtained but by this time black as a slate with the final nightfall. It seemed to me that something like a snail was on the outside of the windowpane. But when I stared harder, it was more like a man's thumb pressed on the pane; it had that curled look that a thumb has. With my fear and courage reawakened together, I rushed at the window and then recoiled with a strangled scream that any man but Arthur must have heard.

"For it was not a thumb, any more than it was a snail. It was the tip of a crooked nose, crushed against the glass; it looked white with the pressure, and the staring face and eyes behind it were at first invisible and afterwards grey like a ghost. I slammed the shutters together somehow, rushed up to my room, and locked myself in. But even as I passed, I could swear I saw a second black window with something on it that was like a snail.

"It might be best to go to Arthur after all. If the thing was crawling close all around the house like a cat, it might have purposes worse even than blackmail. My brother might cast me out and curse me for ever, but he was a gentleman and would defend me on the spot. After ten minutes' curious thinking, I went down, knocked on the door, and then went in: to see the last and worst sight.

"My brother's chair was empty, and he was obviously out. But the man with the crooked nose was sitting waiting for his return, with

his hat still insolently on his head, and actually reading one of my brother's books under my brother's lamp. His face was composed and occupied, but his nosetip still had the air of being the most mobile part of his face, as if it had just turned from left to right like an elephant's proboscis. I had thought him poisonous enough while he was pursuing and watching me, but I think his unconsciousness of my presence was more frightful still.

"I think I screamed loud and long, but that doesn't matter. What I did next does matter: I gave him all the money I had, including a good deal in paper which, though it was mine, I daresay I had no right to touch. He went off at last, with hateful, tactful regrets all in long words, and I sat down, feeling ruined in every sense. And yet I was saved that very night by a pure accident. Arthur had gone off suddenly to London, as he so often did, for bargains, and returned, late but radiant, having nearly secured a treasure that was an added splendor even to the family collection. He was so resplendent that I was almost emboldened to confess the abstraction of the lesser gem, but he bore down all other topics with his overpowering projects. Because the bargain might still misfire any moment, he insisted on my packing at once and going up with him to lodgings he had already taken in Fulham, to be near the curio shop in question. Thus in spite of myself, I fled from my foe almost in the dead of night—but from Philip also. . . . My brother was often at the South Kensington Museum, and in order to make some sort of secondary life for myself, I paid for a few lessons at the Art Schools. I was coming back from them this evening, when I saw the abomination of desolation walking alive down the long straight street, and the rest is as this gentleman has said.

"I've got only one thing to say. I don't deserve to be helped, and I don't question or complain of my punishment; it is just, it ought to have happened. But I still question, with bursting brains, how it can have happened. Am I punished by miracle? or how *can* anyone but Philip and myself know I gave him a tiny coin in the middle of the sea?"

"It is an extraordinary problem," admitted Flambeau.

"Not so extraordinary as the answer," remarked Father Brown rather gloomily. "Miss Carstairs, will you be at home if we call at your Fulham place an hour and a half hence?"

The girl looked at him, and then rose and put her gloves on. "Yes," she said, "I'll be there," and almost instantly left the place.

That night the detective and the priest were still talking of the

matter as they drew near the Fulham house, a tenement strangely mean even for a temporary residence of the Carstairs family.

"Of course the superficial, on reflection," said Flambeau, "would think first of this Australian brother who's been in trouble before, who's come back so suddenly, and who's just the man to have shabby confederates. But I can't see how he can come into the thing by any process of thought, unless—"

"Well?" asked his companion patiently.

Flambeau lowered his voice. "Unless the girl's lover comes in, too, and he would be the blacker villain. The Australian chap did know that Hawker wanted the coin. But I can't see how on earth he could know that Hawker had got it, unless Hawker signaled to him or his representative across the shore."

"That is true," assented the priest, with respect.

"Have you noted another thing?" went on Flambeau eagerly. "This Hawker hears his love insulted but doesn't strike till *he's got to the soft sandhills*, where he can be victor in a mere sham fight. If he'd struck amid rocks and sea, he might have hurt his ally."

"That is true again," said Father Brown, nodding.

"And now, take it from the start. It lies between few people, but at least three. You want one person for suicide, two people for murder, but at least three people for blackmail."

"Why?" asked the priest softly.

"Well, obviously," cried his friend, "there must be one to be exposed; one to threaten exposure; and one at least whom exposure would horrify."

After a long ruminant pause, the priest said, "You miss a logical step. Three persons are needed as ideas. Only two are needed as agents."

"What can you mean?" asked the other.

"Why shouldn't a blackmailer," asked Brown in a low voice, "threaten his victim with himself? Suppose a wife became a rigid teetotaller *in order* to frighten her husband into concealing *his* pub frequenting and then wrote him blackmailing letters in another hand, threatening to tell his wife! Why shouldn't it work? Suppose a father forbade a son to gamble and then, following him in a good disguise, threatened the boy with his own sham paternal strictness! Suppose—but here we are, my friend."

"My God!" cried Flambeau, "you don't mean—"

An active figure ran down the steps of the house and showed under the golden lamplight the unmistakable head that resembled

the Roman coin. "Miss Carstairs," said Hawker without ceremony, "wouldn't go in till you came."

"Well," observed Brown confidently, "don't you think it's the best thing she can do to stop outside—with you to look after her? You see, I rather guess you have guessed it all yourself."

"Yes," said the young man in an undertone, "I guessed on the sands and now I know; that was why I let him fall soft."

Taking a latchkey from the girl and the coin from Hawker, Flambeau let himself and his friend into the empty house and passed into the outer parlor. It was empty of all occupants but one. The man whom Father Brown had seen pass the tavern was standing against the wall as if at bay; unchanged, save that he had taken off his black coat and was wearing a brown dressing gown.

"We have come," said Father Brown politely, "to give back this coin to its owner." And he handed it to the man with the nose.

Flambeau's eyes rolled. "Is this man a coin collector?" he asked.

"This man is Mr. Arthur Carstairs," said the priest positively, "and he is a coin collector of a somewhat singular kind."

The man changed color so horribly that the crooked nose stood out on his face like a separate and comic thing. He spoke, nevertheless, with a sort of despairing dignity. "You shall see, then," he said, "that I have not lost all the family qualities." And he turned suddenly and strode into an inner room, slamming the door.

"Stop him!" shouted Father Brown, bounding and half falling over a chair, and after a wrench or two, Flambeau had the door open. But it was too late. In dead silence Flambeau strode across and telephoned for doctor and police.

An empty medicine bottle lay on the floor. Across the table the body of the man in the brown dressing gown lay amid his burst and gaping brown paper parcels out of which poured and rolled, not Roman, but very modern English coins.

The priest held up the bronze head of Caesar. "This," he said, "was all that was left of the Carstairs Collection."

After a silence he went on, with more than common gentleness: "It was a cruel will his wicked father made, and you see he did resent it a little. He hated the Roman money he had, and grew fonder of the real money denied him. He not only sold the collection bit by bit, but sank bit by bit to the basest ways of making money—even to blackmailing his own family in a disguise. He blackmailed his brother from Australia for his little forgotten crime (that is why he took the cab to Wagga Wagga in Putney), he blackmailed his sister

for the theft he alone could have noticed. And that, by the way, is why she had that supernatural guess when he was away on the sand dunes. Mere figure and gait, however distant, are more likely to remind us of somebody than a well-madeup face quite close."

There was another silence. "Well," growled the detective, "and so this great numismatist and coin collector was nothing but a vulgar miser."

"Is there so great a difference?" asked Father Brown in the same strange, indulgent tone. "What is there wrong about a miser that is not often as wrong about a collector? What is wrong, except . . . thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image; thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them, for I . . . but we must go and see how the poor young people are getting on."

"I think," said Flambeau, "that, in spite of everything, they are probably getting on very well."

---

### **SOLUTION TO THE MAY "UNSOLVED":**

---

Chet and Julia O'Shea were the thieving pair. They were from Wisconsin.

| SEAT | HUSBAND      | WIFE  | STATE          |
|------|--------------|-------|----------------|
| 1    | Elmer Parker | Kathy | Virginia       |
| 2    | Bob Nolan    | Gina  | South Carolina |
| 3    | Dave Ransom  | Inez  | Texas          |
| 4    | Adam Queen   | Lola  | Tennessee      |
| 5    | Franz McKay  | Helga | Utah           |
| 6    | Chet O'Shea  | Julia | Wisconsin      |

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



**D**eborah Woodworth has debuted a promising new series with her first novel, **Death of a Winter Shaker** (Avon, \$5.50). Sister Rose left the North Homage Shaker Village community of her childhood, in rural Kentucky, for a year when she was seventeen, but she heard the call and returned these seventeen years hence. The time is the Depression; young people are all leaving, never to return, while adult novitiates inevitably prove to be nothing more than "Winter Shakers," itinerant and poverty-stricken folks who abide by the community rules only while the weather remains cold. Eventually they too leave. Or at least they did, until a young hobo with an eye for the ladies turns up as a corpse in the community's Herb House. This seems to be enough justification for the townspeople to turn on their strange, self-sufficient neighbors. At the request of her ailing mentor and spiritual leader, it is Rose's job to find out who really murdered Johann Fredericks before the evil sunders the community forever. Bits of Shaker lore add a fresh slant to an historical novel that also offers a neat plot. But it is Rose herself—intelligent, compassionate, and very strong—whom readers will especially want to see again.

Laurie King's third book in her Russell and Holmes series is out, and it's another winner. Sherlock Holmes purists may find fault with this picture of the great detective in his beekeeping years, but I love these books. **A Letter of Mary** (St. Martin's; \$23.95) now finds Holmes married to his former protégée, Mary Russell. But Fate refuses to let Sherlock keep to his bees and Mary to her theological studies at the university. Instead, a visit from an archaeologist shortly followed by the woman's untimely death promises that once again the game is afoot. This series is much more than a new



side of an older Holmes. With the engaging young Mary in the lead, the novel snaps with sharp dialogue and explores the couple's passions (mostly of the scintillating intellectual variety) with rare sophistication. The background story about the letter of the title is a fascinating fictional fancy.

If you're looking, for something light and cosy, try Lydia Adamson's **Beware the Tufted Duck** (Signet, \$5.50). Lucy Wayles is a retired librarian and Southerner who lives in Manhattan and is adored by a retired medical researcher who narrates. Both are bird-watchers, but Lucy does nothing in small measure: she has stopped traffic for hours to save a rare (and very lost!) tufted duck. This notoriety gets her tossed out of her birdwatching club. Undaunted, she forms her own group with several members who were willing to follow her lead. If it is the early bird that catches the worm, it is also the early birdwatching group that stumbles upon a corpse in Central Park—a member of the rival birdwatchers' club. Sharp-eyed as an eagle, Lucy pecks around until she finds evidence that the man wasn't simply a victim of a random mugging. No feather-brain is our Lucy, who stalks her prey—a murderer in the flock.

Although Jean Hager's Molly Bearpaw series deserves comparison with Tony Hillerman for the richness of her Native American (Cherokee, in this case) background, **The Spirit Caller** (Mysterious Press, \$22) is now the fourth in this series and deserves to be taken on its own merits. The murder of a local woman and New Age enthusiast is the center of a wheel that has many spokes: rivalry in the community over spiritual leadership; a ghost who haunts the old building now housing the Native American Research Library; the antagonism of the local sheriff; even the return of Molly's father, a man who abandoned her mother and his child when Molly was a small girl and who now reveals a secret that Molly's beloved grandmother has withheld these many years. Hager gives us authentic and credible characters in emotionally satisfying dramas, tying up all the loose ends in an exciting finale.

It never bodes well when Jonathan Kendrick gets a nocturnal phone call from Anna, his wheelchair-bound grandmother, and **The Dead Past** (Write Way, \$21.95) proves that this time is no exception. As usual, he has to leave his assistant in charge of his Manhattan antiquarian bookshop and head north for Felicity Grove, the small town of his boyhood. He and Anna have collaborated as crimesolvers before—Jonathan very reluctantly, it should be added—but a corpse tossed on Anna's lawn does seem to require

his presence. Jonathan is a sympathetic narrator, while the maudlin mayhem in his life and the lives of his old friends is leavened with jaunty humor.

Fans of historical mysteries should enjoy **The Murder of Edgar Allan Poe** (Carroll & Graf, \$22) by George Egon Hatvary. The conceit here is that Auguste Dupin is much more than a fictional character in several Poe tales: he is Poe's good friend and twinned soul (even to the point of an uncanny resemblance). Thus is it that Dupin takes the news of Poe's death in 1849 very hard and with a great deal of suspicion. Could his old friend have been murdered, his death made to look like a sudden, fatal illness in a strange city where he would surely die alone? Dupin narrates his own story: his voyage from Paris to America, his visit with Poe's grieving aunt and mother-in-law, his invitation to the salons and literary dens of New York, his memorable stay with a wealthy widow (and early love of Poe's) in grand Richmond, and finally his recreation of Poe's last days in the slums of Baltimore. Gradually the miasma clears, and Dupin's worst fears are justified. Someone indeed hated the hard-luck poet enough not only to plot his death, but to make that death a debasement as well. And now that someone has shifted his hatred to Dupin. This is chock full of tidbits about the complex Poe, colorful pictures of mid-eighteenth century America, cameo appearances by Whitman, Tennyson, and others, lots of action scenes with Poeish tints of horror, and finally a budding romance.

# THE STORY THAT WON

The January Mysterious by Leigh Hunt of Austin, go to Lesa Neace of Whites-Hagerty of Melbourne, Florida; Virginia Thompson of Cosing of Fairfax, Virginia; Michigan; Ione Weir of Seaside, California; Miriam M. Noonan of Quincy, Massachusetts; and Jennifer Rand of Salix, Iowa.



Photograph contest was won Texas. Honorable mentions burg, Kentucky; James da; Lyn Roberts of Colorado Cullen of Greenbelt, Mary-Alameda, California; Art Robert Kesling of Ann Arbor,

Heiri Silberman, N.Y.C.

## JUST LOOKING by Leigh Hunt

"And you say your husband sat on that bench every day, ma'am—just watching the deer?" asked the officer as he looked out the window.

She nodded slowly and tried to push away the memory of her husband's bludgeoned body lying crumpled and bloodied beside the bench.

"Did your husband have any enemies?" he asked patiently.

"No," she answered slowly. Her husband's voice grated in her head. "Let them deer get used to me sittin' here, and come huntin' season I'll have my own private shootin' gallery," he had said. She looked around at a dozen familiar antlered heads mounted on the walls. Their sad eyes looked back blankly.

"Sometimes the deer came right up to the house," she said aloud, reminded of those same sad eyes at the windows. "Just pickin' out their spot on the walls," her husband had boasted.

"Too bad those deer are so damn familiar," said the officer with irritation. "They trampled all over the crime scene."

Yes, the deer had come. She knew they would. She could still see them clustered around his body, their bloodied hooves stamping the ground, and, later, the police chasing them into the woods. "He liked to watch the deer," she said absently.

"Yes, ma'am. You said that. Now, if you could just tell me if your husband had any enemies," he asked again.

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINES

## Combo Classified Advertising Order Form

**M  
A  
T  
I  
O  
L**

**BELL MAGAZINES**  
attn: Eileen McCarthy  
Media People  
32 Shepard Road  
P.O. Box 446  
Norfolk, CT 06058

15 WORDS MINIMUM  
Only \$72.00 for 15 Words or Less.  
\$4.80 Each Additional Word.  
Capitalized Words Add \$.60 per Word.

**SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE  
MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER**

**DEADLINE:** Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the 4th preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Firm (Name in Ad) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Basic rate **\$72.00**

\_\_\_\_\_ Additional words at \$4.80 each. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Capitalized words at \$.60 each. \_\_\_\_\_

Total amount for 1 ad \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**15% Savings With 3 Consecutive Month Discount**

a. Multiply one ad total \$ \_\_\_\_\_ x 3 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

b. Multiply total amount on  
above line by x .85 \_\_\_\_\_ x .85 \_\_\_\_\_

c. Total amount for 3 ads \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed for \_\_\_\_\_ Insertion(s) in the next available issue(s)  
Specify heading \_\_\_\_\_

FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET

|               |               |               |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| (1) \$72.00   | (2) \$72.00   | (3) \$72.00   | (4) \$72.00   | (5) \$72.00   |
| (6) \$72.00   | (7) \$72.00   | (8) \$72.00   | (9) \$72.00   | (10) \$72.00  |
| (11) \$72.00  | (12) \$72.00  | (13) \$72.00  | (14) \$72.00  | (15) \$72.00  |
| (16) \$76.80  | (17) \$81.60  | (18) \$86.40  | (19) \$91.20  | (20) \$96.00  |
| (21) \$100.80 | (22) \$105.60 | (23) \$110.40 | (24) \$115.20 | (25) \$120.00 |
| (26) \$124.80 | (27) \$129.60 | (28) \$134.40 | (29) \$139.20 | (30) \$144.00 |

**HOW DO YOU COUNT WORDS?** Name and address must be included in counting the number of words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. City and state count as 1 word each. (Garden City, New York, counts as 2 words.) Zip codes are 1 word. Media People, 32 Shepard Road, P.O. Box 446, Norfolk, CT 06058 count as 10 words.) Phone numbers are 1 word. Abbreviations such as COD, FOB, PO, USA, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. PO Box 145 counts as 2 words.  
PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO MEDIA PEOPLE.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

AM June '97

**HITCHCOCK/QUEEN** combination CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$4.80 per word—payable in advance (\$72.00 minimum). Capitalized words 60¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue, please send order and remittance to Eileen McCarthy, Media People, 32 Shepard Road, PO Box 446, Norfolk, CT 06058, or call 1-800-542-5585 or fax to 860-542-6904.

## ADDITIONAL INCOME

**GET PAID FOR READING BOOKS!** Up to \$100 each. Send name, address: Calco Publishing (Dept. C-102), 22 North Plains, Wallingford, CT 06492.

## ASTROLOGY

**WITCHCRAFT!** Harness its power! Free Protective Pentacle. Write: School, P.O. Box 297AN, Hinton, WV 25951.

## AUTHORS

**PUBLISH YOUR BOOK NOW!** Your book can be produced and promoted by the leading subsidy book publisher. Send for free brochure: HP-5, Vantage Press, 516W.34th St., New York, NY 10001.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS

**FREE CATALOG** Collectible and used mystery books. Dunn and Powell Books, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, ME 04609-1714, dpbooks@acadia.net/www.dpbooks.com

**FREE CATALOGS** Collectible/used mysteries. Murder Is Served, 5273 Bittersweet Drive, Dayton, OH 45429. 937-438-0211.

**MYSTERY ADDICTS!** Free catalog! New and recycled detective fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-C, Cincinnati, OH 45232, 513-242-7527.

**MYSTERY FICTION** New 20-page list. Ted Serin, 555 Old Post Rd. C-15, Edison, NJ 08817.

**ONLINE CATALOG** Black Bird Mysteries. New and collectible mysteries, free newsletter. www.blackbird-mysteries.com or 800-449-7709.

**PULPS AND PAPERBACKS** Amazing Stories, Doc Savage, Shadow, Playboys, Charlie's Angels, X-Files, Star Trek, Starsky/Hutch, TV Collectibles. Catalog \$3.00. TV Guide Catalog \$2.50. Rogofsky, Box 107-MP, Glen Oaks, NY 11004.

**SEND FOR FREE** Catalog of mystery and detective fiction. Canford Books, Drawer 216E, Freeville, NY 13068.

**STRIKING SIMILARITIES** between SCI-FI and Artificial Intelligence. Send \$12.95: A1 Today, Box 309-A, Williamston, MI 48895.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

**ASSEMBLE CRAFT PRODUCTS** at home! Excellent extra income. 100+ companies now hiring - guaranteed! 1-800-377-6000 ext. 9130.

## HELP WANTED

**EASY WORK! EXCELLENT PAY!** Assemble products at home. Call toll free 1-800-467-5566 ext. 766.

## INVENTORS

**FREE INVENTION PACKAGE** Davison & Associates offers complete product development and patenting services using proven methods. Success stories available: 1-800-677-6382.

**INVENTORS:** Receive your FREE information KIT about PATENTING and Marketing. New product ideas. The Concept Network, 1-800-835-2246 ext. 197. Call now!

## MYSTERIES

**"MURDER IN ST. PETERSBURG"** Experience the intrigue as the series unfolds. \$15 is your passport to 19th century Russia. Payable to: Mailbox Mysteries, 13505 Mur-Len/Suite 105, Olathe, KS 66062-1600.

## PERSONAL

**PSYCHIC TELLS YOU** About your financial future, love, success and your health!!! 900-562-1000 Ext. 4937 \$3.99/min. Must be 18+. Serv-U 619-645-8434.

## PUBLISHING

### NEW AUTHORS PUBLISH YOUR WORK

ALL SUBJECTS CONSIDERED

Fiction, Biography, Religious, Poetry, Children's

AUTHORS WORLDWIDE INVITED.

WRITE OR SEND YOUR MANUSCRIPT TO

**MINERVA PRESS**

2 OLD BROMPTON ROAD, LONDON SW7 3DQ, ENGLAND

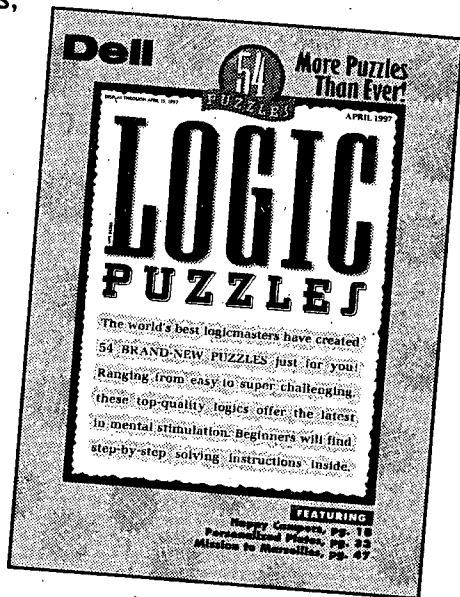
# Challenge your powers of deductive reasoning!

If you enjoy solving mysteries,  
you'll love solving  
**Dell Logic Puzzles.**

Each issue brings more  
than **50** spell-binding logic  
problems, offering hours  
of mental stimulation.

Our logicmasters test  
your ability to think clearly  
and draw conclusions  
by solving puzzles from  
easy to super challenging.

Six intriguing issues  
for only \$15.97.



Save more than 10% off the regular price when you  
subscribe today! **Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed.**



**To charge your order  
by phone, call toll-free:  
1-800-925-1701**

**Outside the USA: 303-678-0439**

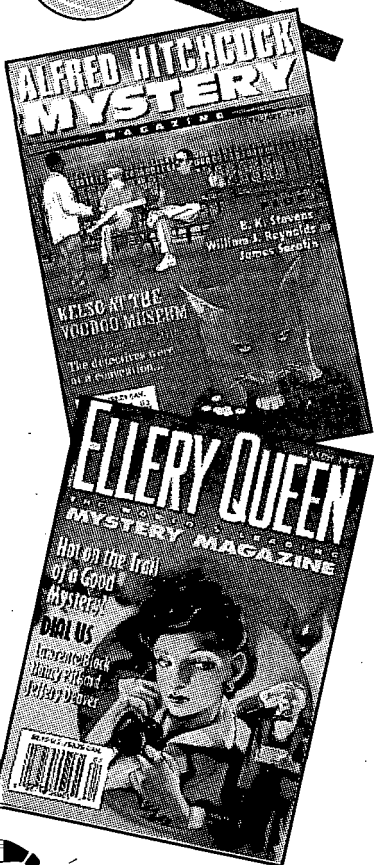


**Or mail your order to:  
Dell Logic Puzzles  
P.O. Box 54625  
Boulder, CO 80322-4625**

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your first issue.  
Outside USA: Add \$2 per year for shipping and handling (U.S. funds only). HF975

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Twice the Murder and Mayhem



Double your reading pleasure with a subscription to both **Alfred Hitchcock** and **Ellery Queen**!

Each magazine brings you award-winning fiction from many of the top mystery writers of our time.

And now you can **save more than 25%** off the regular price while you enjoy the convenience of home delivery. You'll get a total of 24 issues (12 issues of each magazine) for only \$49.97. **You save \$18.00!**

Call today to begin your subscriptions to **Alfred Hitchcock** and **Ellery Queen** at this special low rate.

To charge your order by phone, call toll-free, **1-800-333-3311**  
Outside the USA: 303/678-0439

Or mail your order to:  
Special Mystery Subscription Offer  
P.O. Box 54625  
Boulder, CO 80322-4625

If you already subscribe, you can still take advantage of this special low price.  
Be sure to mention you're currently a subscriber when you order.

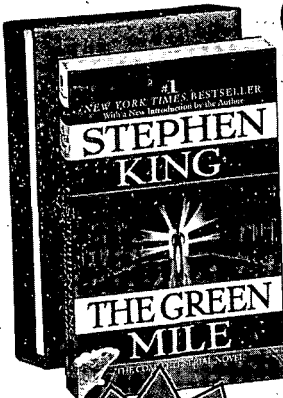
Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your first issue. We publish a double issue, which counts as two issues toward your subscription, of each magazine. Outside USA:  
Add \$16 per year for shipping & handling (U.S. funds only, payable with order).



# STEPHEN KING THE GREEN MILE

All six parts of the serial thriller in an exclusive slipcased edition

Get it now for only \$7.95!



**EXCLUSIVE  
SLIPCASED  
EDITION!**

## How The Stephen King Library works:

- ◆ Examine The Green Mile FREE for 10 days.
- ◆ Keep it, and pay just \$7.95, plus shipping and handling.
- ◆ You'll then receive a different hardcover King book about every six weeks, each with a 10-day FREE trial!
- ◆ You choose, in advance, which titles you'd like, so you'll never get a book you don't want—GUARANTEED!
- ◆ You'll get King's newest bone-chillers delivered to your door as soon as they're published!
- ◆ Future hardcover volumes cost only \$14.95 (plus shipping and handling)—a deep discount off publishers' prices.



## YOURS FREE!

Enjoy this spooky  
skeleton key chain  
FREE just for trying  
*The Green Mile* now!



Clip and send today to:  
The Stephen King Library • Camp Hill, PA • 17012-0001

**YES!** I want to check out my exclusive, slipcased, softcover edition of *The Green Mile* for a no-risk, 10-day **FREE** trial. If I keep it, I'll pay just \$7.95, plus shipping and handling. I understand that you'll send me a list of titles from which I can indicate the King books I want to receive. Future books in the series will arrive about every 6 weeks, and may be reviewed for 10 days with **no obligation to buy**. I will be billed a low \$14.95, plus shipping and handling, for each subsequent volume I keep. I may cancel at any time. If I return *The Green Mile*, my subscription will be automatically canceled. The **FREE skeleton key chain** is mine to keep, no matter what.

7-M2

Name \_\_\_\_\_

SK255-6-0

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

## SEND NO MONEY NOW!

All orders subject to approval. Prices subject to change.

The Stephen King Library is a division of  
Book-of-the-Month Club, Inc. © 1997 BOMC

Do you have a telephone? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Have you ever bought anything by mail in the past year? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How have you paid for your mail-order purchases? (check all that apply)

☐ CASH ☐ CREDIT CARD ☐ CHECK ☐ MONEY ORDER

#042

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED